ASSESSMENT OF INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO TESTING COMMUNITY OPINION

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Acknowledgements

The information gathered in this report represents the collective wisdom of a great many users, commissioners of, and participants in, public sector consultation in Scotland. We are extremely grateful to them for their willingness to share their experience both with us, and more widely, through the publication of this report. Thanks are due also to those who have shown their continued support for the development of good consultation practice by allowing their names to be used as a further source of information for others who may wish to follow their example in the use of a particular technique.

Finally we would like to express our gratitude to Nicola Edge and Linda Nicholson of the Scottish Executive Central Research Unit and to members of the Advisory Group who oversaw the project.
SUMMARY

Research Aims and Objectives

The aims of this research were:

- to review existing literature and guidance on community consultation
- to collate and review evidence on the effectiveness and appropriateness of new techniques with an emphasis on innovation
- to identify and describe examples of the use of new techniques with particular reference to Scotland

The research focused on the use of innovative approaches to consultation by a range of agencies and in a range of policy contexts within Scotland. It should, however, be noted that views on ‘innovation’ differed between organisations – what was innovative or new to one agency may have been commonplace to another. Furthermore, many of the innovative approaches to consultation identified took the form of adaptation and customisation of traditional techniques rather than the introduction of new ones.

Research Methods

This report is based upon a wide range of research sources:

- secondary research based on accessing technical articles on the use of different types of consultation technique. A wide range of different articles and publications were identified (see Annex 2)
- telephone audit of 126 public sector organisations in Scotland to establish the range of consultation techniques used in the past 2 years, to collect details on at least one of the approaches used and to assess future plans for the use of consultation approaches.
- identification of 8 case study organisations\(^1\) within which the views of research commissioners and users of the more innovative consultation approaches were investigated through the use of in-depth interviews
- programme of 98 telephone interviews with those who had taken part in some of the consultation exercises conducted by the case study organisations to obtain the views of consultees on their experiences and feelings about the consultation process.

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\(^1\) These case studies were not intended to provide a definitive picture of the application of each approach. They were included for illustrative purposes, and the context for consultation in these organisations is key to understanding the application and effectiveness of particular techniques.
Context

A review of the literature on consultation revealed that a range of typologies have been devised in an attempt to classify and define consultation techniques. These are explored at the start of Chapter 2, ‘Context’. Fundamental to each approach was the principle that consultation should not equate to simply informing, or being informed by, consultees.

As identified in the City of Edinburgh Council\(^2\) Guide, and endorsed in many others, consultation should involve:

- “participation - actively involving service users in developing or amending policy, practice or a particular initiative
- partnership – the community or service users acting as co-architects of an initiative or policy”.

Once a clear need and role for the consultation have been identified, an evaluation of the range of possible approaches to consultation should be undertaken. The approach selected should take account of the role of the consultation, the scale, nature and structure of the target audience, the resources available for the consultation and logistical considerations covering timing and the location of the exercise. Before commencing any consultation, consideration should be given to how the consultation outputs will be used. Chapter 2, ‘Context’, provides detailed guidance on this.

What Makes Good Consultation?

There were clear variations in the extent to which different organisations used, planned and evaluated consultation exercises, but there is a fundamental need for consultation to be:

- a two way process - actively involving the community wherever possible
- appropriate - consulting on relevant issues with relevant groups
- stimulating for consultees - making use of more interactive methods of involving consultees and varying the means by which consultees are consulted
- informative - providing consultees with feedback
- inclusive – ensuring all relevant groups or sub groups are given equal opportunity to contribute to the exercise

Specific considerations, raised by this study, that should be borne in mind when planning consultation include:

- Maximise the opportunity for consultees to have their say in planning and designing the consultation and identifying issues for consultation
- Consider the evaluation of the consultation at the earliest stage and allocate adequate time and resources to this part of the process

\(^2\) City of Edinburgh Council, *Consultation Matters: a guide to consultation*
Consider the extent to which consultation has been effective in meeting the needs of all parties, not just the organisations’ needs

Work with partners where possible on the consultation exercise and strategic planning of the consultation

Consider the representativeness of those being consulted and the extent to which they have been properly targeted and recruited

Develop support and stimulus materials (including feedback mechanisms) to ensure that these are as helpful and informative as possible

Ensure the realistic time-tableing of consultation exercises

Why and How Scottish Organisations Consult

The extent of consultation undertaken by the Scottish agencies participating in this research varied, as detailed at Chapter 3, ‘Why and How Scottish Organisations Are Consulting’. However, almost all were involved or likely to be involved in some form of consultation and some agencies were running a wide range of consultation exercises, either independently or in partnership with others. Many of the consultation approaches used were of an informal or qualitative nature, and more innovative approaches such as citizens’ juries, citizens’ panels or deliberative polling were used less often. However, this picture was changing rapidly and the future consultation plans of these organisations revealed an expanding role for many of these techniques. Many organisations intended to make use of new technologies as well as new methods and approaches in the near future.

Planning Consultation

For reasons detailed above, strategic planning of consultation was a key issue facing organisations as they responded to statutory requirements to consult and a desire to develop policies and tailor service delivery more effectively to targeted user groups (see Chapter 4, ‘Planning Consultation’). A growing enthusiasm for consultation often meant that planning and co-ordination of consultation programmes had received less attention. However, there were signs of some attempts to ‘rein-in’ and better co-ordinate individual consultation exercises through increased forward planning and/or better sharing of information within and between agencies. The extent of joint working between agencies also highlighted the need for fora to encourage feedback and debate on different approaches to consultation.

Evaluating Consultation

Given the range and nature of the aims associated with different consultation approaches being used, it is important that some process is in place which assesses the extent to which the consultation helped to realise its stated aims. It is also important to evaluate any consultation in terms of the process or approach followed. Most of the evaluation work undertaken to date has focussed on process rather than outcome, as discussed in Chapter 5, ‘Evaluating Consultation’. There is a growing need for outcome evaluation, including the extent to which consultation has contributed to the development of policy and practice.
CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The opening chapter of this report details the background to the research, outlines the research aims and outputs and summarises the approach used to gather this information.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Research techniques such as household surveys, focus groups and public meetings have traditionally been employed as ways of testing community opinion but a growing body of research suggests that these represent only a narrow range of possible approaches to community consultation\(^3\). Over the last few years the range of research and consultation techniques has broadened to allow more interactive and participative community consultation\(^4\). Further, moves have been made to share with the local community some of the commissioning organisation’s power to set the consultation agenda and interpret consultation results.

Local government has led the way in developing and piloting new techniques to gauge community opinion and encourage active citizenship using a raft of approaches including deliberative polls, citizens’ panels and citizens’ juries. These techniques tend to be more participative and are designed not only to gauge the views and needs of the community but also to build social capital and to engage and empower the local community. Deliberative tools such as citizens’ juries\(^5\) and deliberative polling (both of which brief participants with background information and allow them time to deliberate over a specific policy issue or question) have been found to promote mutual understanding, consensus building and active citizenship. Studies of pilot juries\(^6\), for example, have shown that members of the local community are both willing and able to address complex policy issues and decision making. Citizens’ panels\(^7\) have been found, by some organisations, to be a cost-effective resource that can be used as the basis for formal consultation on a range of issues.

An increased responsiveness to community needs lies at the heart of many recent policy developments such as Best Value, community planning and social inclusion initiatives and reflects a marked change in the way public sector agencies are listening to, and working with, local communities and ‘communities of interest’. These values form the basis of the Listening to Communities initiative\(^8\), which reflects a growing concern about the extent to which existing community and consultative structures can fully reflect and respond to the needs and priorities of the whole community. As the Minister for Area Regeneration, stated in his announcement of the implementation of the programme, “to build strong socially inclusive communities we must first listen to them to find out what they want”.

\(^3\) LARIA, ‘Consultation, Community Involvement and Participation’ in Research for Policy ’97.
\(^8\) ‘Listening to Communities’ was officially launched by the Minister for Regeneration in Nov 1998 as a strand of the New Deal for Communities initiative. The programme will invest £3 million over the next 3 years to promote community consultation and active participation and will look to discover the best ways of enhancing the role of excluded communities in decision making and in the expression of community needs and opinions.
The Listening to Communities initiative aims to add value to local initiatives such as Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) by developing a strategic approach to community participation. The programme seeks to develop processes that serve to encourage and enhance local community participation in partnerships and decision making. An integral element of the programme is the identification and investigation of new approaches to exploring community needs, aspirations and opinions and the dissemination of best practice and expertise in the appropriate application and evaluation of such techniques. This research was commissioned to contribute to this process.

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The stated aims of the research were:

- to review existing literature and guidance on community consultation
- to collate and review evidence on the effectiveness and appropriateness of the new techniques, and
- to identify and describe examples of the use of new techniques with particular reference to Scotland

Within the review of each new technique, the research has attempted to provide guidance on:

- the relative advantages and disadvantages of each technique
- when and where to use each technique, identifying the issues which can appropriately be addressed and the role that the technique can play
- how to apply each technique giving some indications of how to sample and identify participants, organise the consultation and continue the involvement with participants after the main consultation period is over
- how to evaluate the consultation process and outcomes

Chapter 2 of this report sets the context for this research by examining recent thinking on innovative approaches to consultation set against a review of relevant literature. Chapters 3 to 5 look at consultation in Scotland and provide more general guidance on the application, implementation and evaluation of consultation. Detailed information from practitioners, users and commissioners of the techniques is provided in Chapter 6, based on interviews with case study organisations. This chapter moves beyond a theoretical view of consultation, providing guidance on the practical implementation of these techniques within the case study organisations.

This report focuses on the use of innovative approaches to consultation and identifies their use by a range of agencies in a range of policy situations. As such, examples of innovation include the use of new methods of consultation, new ways of engaging participants in the consultation process, and new forms of planning and sharing consultation exercises. It should, however, be noted that views on innovation differed between organisations and what was innovative or new to one agency may have been commonplace in another. Furthermore, much of the innovation identified involved the adaptation of traditional techniques to enhance
their effectiveness or appropriateness to a particular situation. For example, the use of video diaries or theatrical productions to stimulate discussion at focus groups or conferences.

In identifying innovative approaches, the report identifies examples where such approaches have been tested by Scottish organisations, although their use may be commonplace elsewhere. For example, techniques such as Planning for Real or community profiling were not widespread within Scotland at the time of the research but were commonly used within other parts of the UK. The focus of the study was very much on Scotland, and Scottish examples are used in the detailed case studies. The experience of consultation users outside Scotland has, however, provided much of the valuable contextual material presented alongside the case study examples.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODS

A wide range of sources provided the detail upon which this report is based. A full outline of the approach used is annexed. In summary the approach comprised:

- secondary research using printed and electronic media to access technical articles on the use of different types of consultation approach. A wide range of different articles and publications were identified, although greatest emphasis has been placed in this review on those with a Scottish focus or which have a practical rather than theoretical approach. A full list of references is provided at Annex 2.

- a telephone audit of 126 organisations in Scotland to establish the range of consultation techniques used by them in the past 2 years, to collect details on at least one of the approaches used and to assess future plans for the use of consultation approaches. In determining which approaches to collect information on from each organisation, a monitor was kept for the first 20 interviews to establish which approaches were being identified as having been used in the last 2 years and which had been used most recently. For these first 20 interviews details were collected on the most recent approach used. Thereafter a hierarchy was established whereby the more innovative approaches used were selected as the focus of further questioning. In this way it was possible to obtain details on a wide range of techniques used, but this does not provide a comprehensive list of all the techniques used by an organisation.

- identification of eight case study organisations from which the views of both consultees and research commissioners on the consultation approaches used were accessed. Organisations included in this were selected to cover a range of different types of organisation on the basis of the nature of the organisation and the range and type of consultation approaches used by them. Hence, within each of the organisational types identified the earlier scoping exercise was used to identify those agencies using the widest range of innovative techniques and these were then targeted for the next phase. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted with key staff within these organisations to establish full details on use of the approaches used. Internal reports and papers on these approaches were also reviewed.

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9 These case studies were not intended to provide a definitive picture of the application of each approach. They were included for illustrative purposes, and the context for consultation in these organisations is key to understanding the application and effectiveness of particular techniques

10 Local Authorities, LECs, Health Boards, Pathfinders, SIPs and Housing Associations.
a programme of 98 telephone interviews was undertaken with those who had taken part in consultation exercises conducted by the case study organisations to obtain the experiences and opinions of consultees

The research commenced in September 1999 and the fieldwork was completed in January 2000. Examples of good practice in terms of the use of effective and innovative consultation approaches are included throughout the report.
CHAPTER TWO  CONTEXT

This chapter considers the context for this research, establishes reasons for consulting, provides an insight into the general principles underlying good consultation, and considers how best to plan consultation and the range of approaches that may be used. Detail is provided on the various stages that make up a consultation exercise, identifying good practice where appropriate and beginning with a synopsis of the main issues emerging from existing literature on consultation.

2.1 WHY CONSULT?

As acknowledged in a Cabinet Office guide,\textsuperscript{11} \textit{How to Consult Your Users}, the private sector has consulted its users for some time; those in business know that if they do not develop products and services that meet the needs of their consumers these consumers will be free to move to other suppliers.

The same arguments do not hold for the public sector; it is not easy to simply purchase rubbish collection or economic development services from another organisation or to choose which police service to call in an emergency. However, despite the apparent lack of choice that faces consumers of public services, there are many reasons for consulting users on ways to inform, enhance and develop public service delivery and policy making.

Consultation forms an integral part of various government initiatives aimed at both enhancing involvement in decision making and ensuring accountability. The consultation framework within which local authorities in Scotland operate was summarised in a recent COSLA document\textsuperscript{12}. As stated in this document “public participation is regarded as one of the hallmarks of good government”. In \textit{Modern Government: in touch with the people} (1998), the government makes participation one of the cornerstones of its drive to modernise local government. Key developments in the path to achieve this are;

- \textit{Best Value} - the first and second reports of the Joint Working Task Force on Best Value\textsuperscript{13} requires councils to show that they are developing effective means to involve people in shaping policies and services.

- \textit{Guidance on Service and Performance Reviews} (COSLA/Accounts Commission, 1998) - focuses on the needs of the community and openness and accountability as part of the process of continuous improvement in service delivery, with particular attention paid to groups often excluded from the democratic process.

- \textit{Democratic renewal} - as outlined in COSLA's response to the Commission on Local Government and the Scottish Parliament\textsuperscript{14}, there is a need to strengthen the democratic base of local government through the development of new forms of dialogue between councils and their communities. The participative approaches alluded to in this thinking would help to strengthen local democracy.

\textsuperscript{11} Cabinet Office (1998) \textit{An Introductory Guide - How to consult your users?}
\textsuperscript{12} COSLA (1998) \textit{Focusing on Citizens : A Guide to Approaches and Methods}
\textsuperscript{13} The Scottish Office July 1997 and July 1998
\textsuperscript{14} Consultation Paper No 1 919980
Decentralisation - inherent within the Local Government Scotland Act (1994) is a means by which communities can be more involved in local decision making and the development of services and as such help councils to be more accessible, responsive and accountable.

Community Planning - approaches are outlined in the report of the Community Planning Working Group (1998) COSLA and the Scottish Office. Councils are identified as having a leading role in helping find new ways to enable communities to participate effectively through partnerships to generate a shared vision for an area and the contributions of those who will help attain the vision.

Social Exclusion in Scotland (1998) - COSLA’s response identified the need for bottom up approaches:

“a key measure of success will be empowering people who have been excluded and identifying and removing barriers to their participation in mainstream life so they have enhanced life opportunities and well-being.”

Statutory provisions also require input from the user groups of a range of organisations such as housing associations, local authorities through Best Value, Community Care and Child Care plans and tenant participation initiatives for example. Consultation is also an essential requirement of partnership initiatives such as Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIPs) and Working for Communities Pathfinders (Pathfinders).

However, consultation should not take place merely to meet statutory requirements. There is little to be gained from poorly planned consultation that takes place purely on this basis. As pointed out in a recent LARIA newsletter:

“the sources of information are probably less important than the value attached to it and the ways in which it is used. The willingness and ability to evaluate material, from whatever source, to understand its characteristics and its reliability and to relate it to local circumstances are most important”

For consultation to become ‘good consultation’ it must be more than a top down approach. A truly participative consultation exercise will involve communities in all aspects of the process; say from identifying the issues affecting their communities and a need for views to be sought on certain issues, to the analysis of the outcomes of the consultation and the development of appropriate strategies to implement subsequent activity.

There are many benefits to consultation and these are summarised overleaf, based on comments made by those taking part in this study and as identified in much of the literature on consultation reviewed for this research. Only the key benefits have been highlighted and this does not represent a comprehensive list of consultation benefits. Further, it is recognised that the relative importance of these benefits will vary from project to project.

THE BENEFITS OF CONSULTATION

Organisational Benefits:

- **Informs policy making** at a local level. Communities can add value to the decisions made.

- **Informs service planning.** With tight budgets, it is important to identify essential needs and priorities to prevent waste, duplication of effort and fragmentation of effort. Consultation should help to ensure that services delivered are relevant to users, delivered in an appropriate manner, equally accessible to all and delivered efficiently and effectively.

- Helps to **measure how organisations are performing**. This requires careful identification of those to be consulted. For example, it may be important to obtain the views of non-users as reasons for non-use may be as illuminating as the views of service users.

- Helps to **gauge perceptions of the image of the organisation** or department. Views on individual services and departments are an integral part of the view of the organisation.

- Examines **how the organisation is seen within the community** and the role that the organisation is seen to play in tackling issues of importance to the community. It should be borne in mind that people do not have a clear idea of where responsibilities end between agencies. As such, consultation can **help identify areas where joined up working may be desirable** and can help identify which roles individual agencies should play.

- **Alerts the organisation to potential problems** and allow necessary changes to be made.

- **Establishes the organisation as open and accountable.** This underlies the principle of local democracy and helps build the idea of community ownership.

Community Benefits:

- With proper planning, consultation may involve those who may not normally be included through conventional routes, ensuring **everyone has a voice.**

- **Communities can help set performance standards** and monitor progress towards meeting these targets over time.

- Consultation with the community **will identify the needs of the community.** Communities can help set priorities for the future and share control of the local agenda.

- **Encourages greater acceptance of the responsibility that communities** have towards identifying important issues in their communities and delivering effective solutions. Consultation will widen ownership of decision making.

- **Builds community spirit and co-operative working.**

- **Individuals are empowered and do not have to accept situations passively.**
2.2 DEFINING CONSULTATION

To ensure that consultation takes communication with groups to a stage beyond that of simple information retrieval, it is useful to consider Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Participation’\(^{17}\) to help understand the difference between participation and involvement.

**Figure 2.1 Ladder of Participation**

It is only when the dialogue with citizens moves above the bottom 4 rungs of the ladder that citizens become engaged in a process that actually *involves* them. As stated in a government consultation paper on sustainable development\(^ {18}\):

> “Public participation in decision making is not just about getting agreement to decisions by local authorities and other public bodies, but involving local communities in identifying problems and opportunities … and in taking action for change”.

South Lanarkshire Council developed this ladder of participation into the ‘Wheel of Participation’. Under this scheme, one moves from the extreme of no community input, with the Council taking all the decisions, through consultation and participation to citizen empowerment, where the community make their own decisions on issues that affect them.

**Figure 2.2 Wheel of Participation** [Source: South Lanarkshire Council – A Guide to Consultation]

All stages shown within the wheel are appropriate in different contexts; for example, information collection is an essential element in achieving successful participation. By presenting the stages in a wheel format, it is intended to show a flow between stages, rather than to suggest competitiveness between approaches.

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\(^{17}\)New Economics Foundation, *Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century.*

### SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL’S WHEEL OF PARTICIPATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Information:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Minimal communication</td>
<td>Council deciding on all matters itself, without community consultation (except when legally required to do so), i.e. Where professional judgement is used or a political decision is made and the public hear of it after the event, e.g. via the minutes of committee meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Limited information</td>
<td>Telling the public only what you want to tell them, not what the public wants to know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Good quality information</td>
<td>Providing information that the community wants and/or needs, e.g. promotional campaigns about uptake of welfare benefits, discussion papers/exhibitions for development plans, guidance notes for conservation area development/upgrading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Limited consultation</td>
<td>Providing information in a limited manner with the onus often placed on the community to respond, e.g. placing a notice in the press regarding planning/licensing applications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Customer care</td>
<td>Having a customer-oriented service, e.g. introducing a customer care policy, and providing a complaints/comments scheme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Genuine consultation</td>
<td>The Council actively discussing issues with communities regarding what it is thinking of doing prior to taking action, or what they think of existing services, e.g. housing services liasing with tenants’ groups, customer satisfaction surveys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Participation:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Effective advisory body</td>
<td>Inviting communities to draw up proposals for council consideration, e.g. Planning for Real, citizens’ juries, disability forums, Plain English Campaign.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Partnership</td>
<td>Solving problems in partnership with communities, e.g. Hamilton Ahead (a formal partnership), Larkhall Joint Neighbourhood Project, and Douglas Valley Partnership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Limited decentralised decision-making</td>
<td>Allowing different communities to make their own decisions on some issues, e.g. non-statutory traffic signs for Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, the powers of Divisional Roads Engineers and Tenant Participation Officers to involve the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Delegated control</td>
<td>Delegating limited decision-making powers in a particular area or project, e.g. Tenant Management Organisations, Shopmobility and school boards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


11. Interdependent control

The Council may be obliged to provide a service but chooses to do so by facilitating community groups and/or other agencies which provide that service on their behalf, e.g. the delivery of care services contracts by the voluntary sector, Tenant Management Organisations.

12. Entrusted control

Devolving substantial decision-making powers to communities, e.g. Tenant Management Organisations.

Various Council projects will be positioned differently on the wheel. South Lanarkshire Council acknowledged that most of its activity was positioned on the information and consultation part of the wheel. However, it hoped that most Council services would achieve Stage 6, that of genuine consultation, with progression to more participative approaches where possible.

A number of other typologies have been devised in an attempt to classify and define consultation. For example, Vaghania (1998) identifies four broad principles for any consultation exercise:

- **Participation** - which means opening up the design of the consultation process to include those most directly affected, and agreeing to analyse data together

- **Negotiation** - to reach agreement about what will be monitored or evaluated, how and when the data will be collected and analysed, what the data actually means and how findings will be shared and action taken

- **Learning** - which becomes the basis for subsequent improvement and corrective action

- **Flexibility** - to allow the number, role and skills of stakeholders, the external environment and other factors to change over time.

Other documents attempt to provide a framework to assess the input of different types of consultation approaches, in terms of the criteria set for the consultation or the role of each as a channel for providing information, collecting information or involving participants. Fundamental to all these approaches is the underlying principle that consultation does not equate to simply collecting information from users or using consultation to inform users about a given course of action. As explained in Consultation Matters, “to be meaningful, consultation must be a two way process”, and so consultation may involve informing and promoting, but that is not enough in itself. The Council’s guidance defines consultation as:

- “participation - actively involving service users in developing or amending policy, practice or a particular initiative

- **partnership** – the community or service users acting as co-architects of an initiative or policy”.

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21 City of Edinburgh Council, *Consultation Matters: A Guide to Consultation*
2.3 EXISTING GUIDANCE ON CONSULTATION

As indicated throughout the report, a number of very useful guides exist that can help organisations to plan their consultation exercises. Details on several key texts identified during the course of this study are provided below. It is acknowledged that due to the limited amount of time available for this element of the project it was not possible to review all the existing literature on this subject. In identifying the following publications the researchers focused on more practical texts and those with a Scottish orientation. A fuller listing of all the printed and electronic documents consulted is in Annex 2.


This includes a general section on the overall context and rationale for involving the public and specific sections describing various approaches and methods for involving the public. The final section looks at ways of ensuring that best use is made of the results. There is a useful summary at the start of the report that identifies users of different techniques although not all are Scottish organisations.


This forms a supplement to the above report and provides examples on approaches and methods used that were submitted by Councils in Scotland. For Councils volunteering information, details have been collected on the aims of the approach, the approach used, resource implications and a contact for further information.


This document begins with an introduction about consultation generally, before looking at different methods of consultation, including some innovative approaches. Examples of approaches followed are provided, drawn largely from UK organisations that have been awarded Charter Mark status in 1997. Cost information is not generally provided.


This report documents the extent to which local authorities in England have been involved in using various approaches to enhance public participation. It uses a case study approach to look at the views of local authorities and citizens on different initiatives used and is intended to help guide local authorities on the selection, implementation and evaluation of initiatives.


This guide has two aims; the first to promote good practice in the techniques detailed, the second to encourage the identification of other approaches. The guide provides a grid to help choose the best techniques and illustrates techniques with practitioners’ experience. A number of different techniques have been included that are not fully explored in other texts. However, the guide does tend to concentrate on the unusual and not all approaches are given consideration.
Although somewhat dated now, and focusing largely on English local authorities, the report documents a range of initiatives that have been used to involve the public. It examines ways of consulting with the voluntary sector, partnership working and reaching citizens from minority ethnic populations and those with disabilities.

Local authorities in Scotland in particular have produced a range of guides to consultation, essentially for use by their staff. They too provide details on approaches and are often illustrated by case study information outlining resource needs and providing advice on issues to consider before selecting a particular approach. The documents also set the context for consultation within each local authority and underline the role of consultation in helping to meet the authorities’ wider objectives. The next sections distil some of the guidance material reviewed into some general guidelines for planning consultation.

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For example Fife, Edinburgh, Aberdeenshire, South Lanarkshire and Dumfries and Galloway
2.4 WHAT MAKES GOOD CONSULTATION?

Ensuring that any consultation undertaken is effective requires consideration of the following key principles.

THE INITIAL PLANNING STAGE

Consultation should not be rushed into. The decision to consult in the first instance should be made only after a detailed assessment has been carried out of the nature and purpose of the consultation and the impact that it can have. Before taking action it is important to take time to plan and prepare the consultation and to think carefully about key questions such as:

Figure 2.3 Planning Consultation

All of these questions need to be considered at the planning stage and before any definite decision to consult is made. Particular attention should be paid to the key questions:

Q: Is Consultation Necessary?

Q: How Will Consultation Inputs And Outputs Be Used?

Q: What Constraints Limit The Consultation Exercise?

Bear in mind that relevant consultation or research may already have been undertaken, and consider the possibility of accessing this information from other local or national sources or from other work completed by your organisation or partner organisations. This could save you considerable time and effort and help ease the burden on communities at risk of being over consulted. Consultation overload is a particular concern for smaller communities and should be minimised if at all possible. Even if you decide that there is a need for more up to date or local input, it is still useful to go through a wider trawl of existing information and other consultation or research that is taking place. This may help set the parameters for the new study and provide useful benchmarks against which the local picture can be compared.
THE DETAILED PLANNING STAGE

Once a clear need and role for the consultation are identified, consideration of the various consultation approaches should be undertaken. A suggested approach to considering each of the elements detailed in Figure 2.3 follows. Many of the principles outlined in this section are fundamental to consultation planning and will already be familiar to those who have participated in and planned such exercises.

Q: Why Consult?

Begin by detailing both the direct and indirect objectives underlying the consultation. Think about the strategic objectives of your organisation and about the priority given to empowering and facilitating users to become involved in decision making that affects them. As such, your choice of approach may reflect a desire to enhance communication with particular groups, or to involve the community or develop the skills and capacity of the community, or to raise issues of concern and help set priorities for action. Clearly stating the objectives of the consultation should help set the context within which the consultation will take place and will help ensure an appropriate choice of consultation approach. These wider strategic goals should have a significant impact on the detailed approach followed.

The approach should be capable of obtaining the desired outputs and it is therefore important to be clear about the issue(s) to be addressed by the consultation. Many issues are complex, and there may be a need to break these down into a series of individual issues or to prioritise them to facilitate the process.

At this stage you must identify the type of outputs you require. For example, do you want to know how many people behave in a particular way, do you want to know how they behave or do you want to understand why they behave as they do? At all times, it is important to explain to consultees what input you require and how this input will feed into the consultation exercise and the wider consultation process.

Q: What Are The Limitations?

Be realistic about the limitations facing the consultation. If there are certain courses of action that are not feasible, you should identify these to consultees at the outset so as to avoid wasted time and effort. This will also help prevent unrealistic expectations from being raised.

By identifying the real and potential limitations of the exercise at the outset, it may be possible to take action to reduce some of these. For example, it may be that certain courses of action are outwith the remit of your organisation, but, by working in partnership with others and involving them in the consultation at the outset, it may be possible to address these limitations and to extend the range of possible solutions.

Some consideration should also be given at the outset to the ways in which potentially conflicting views may be used. If several different groups are to be consulted for example, there may be a need to prioritise the views of one group over others. Thinking about this issue at the outset will also help structure the consultation both in terms of when different groups are consulted and the resources allocated to each part of this process.
Q: How Will Consultation Inputs and Outputs Be Used?

As all the guidance points out, before commencing any consultation, consideration should be given to how the input of consultees will feed into the consultation process. Care in particular should be taken to ensure that the consultation is not merely a token gesture where decisions have already been made, nor that the range of options for responding to issues raised is narrowed unnecessarily by resource constraints or political considerations. To help gauge the scope for action from the consultation exercise, establish at the outset:

Q: How will the consultation outputs be used?
Q: Who can take action and make the decisions based on these outputs?
Q: How will this action be achieved?

Identify those who will make use of these outputs at the beginning of the consultation process and involve them in planning the consultation exercise. This will make it easier to ensure that the results are implemented without a need to explain the process and the recommendations later and may speed up the implementation stage. Also, as detailed in Chapter 4, ‘Planning Consultation’, it may be possible to widen the scope for action by identifying partners and involving them in the process from the outset.

The experience of those conducting consultation exercises indicates the need to recognise that some consultation outputs may be immediately effective and put to use, whilst other outputs may have a less immediate but longer term impact on thinking and policy development. Consultees need to be made aware of this and the value of their inputs on a practical and strategic level should be made as clear as possible. Consultation planning should also consider short-term action and the longer-term policy development process. Different approaches will be needed to ensure that relevant staff receive the outputs that in particular the strategic implications of the consultation are not forgotten or diminished over time.

Plans for providing feedback to consultees should be made at the outset and information on this should be provided to consultees when their views are first being sought. This may help reassure consultees of the value being placed on their involvement and may clarify the aims of the consultation. It should be made clear how, and at what point, their input will be fed into the wider consultation process and this will to ensure that appropriate input is provided. As later comments from consultees reveal, in planning the feedback on the exercise, care should be taken to ensure that this is offered, where appropriate, as soon as possible after the exercise is completed. Not only does this maintain the impetus of the exercise and provide an assurance that the information has been used, it also gives the opportunity for further comment and allows consultees to remain involved with the process. Feedback provided should explain the final outcome of the exercise and if and why decisions were made. If it has not been possible to adopt all of the recommendations or views of consultees, some explanation of the reasons behind this omission should be provided.

This is one of the points made by organisations attempting to define what makes a successful consultation and which is reinforced in texts about consultation practice. Effective participation should offer consultees the opportunity to take ownership of an issue, and having provided input into the decisions or solutions arrived at, should also be able to oversee the introduction of these solutions and be involved in the process of implementation.

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23 New Economics Foundation, Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21st century
**Q:** Who To Consult?

Experience indicates how important it is to clearly define the target group for consultation at the outset. If your reasons for consulting and the issues you wish to consult about have been clearly identified, then the groups you wish to consult should be relatively easy to identify.

Various groups you may consider consulting include:

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<tr>
<th>?</th>
<th>Those living in a certain neighbourhood or area.</th>
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<tr>
<td>This is likely to form the focus of most of the consultation activities of the area based SIPS in Scotland, for example, although even within these areas there is a need to acknowledge the neighbourhood dimension of some issues and so even more targeted approaches may be used.</td>
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<th>Those with certain characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Whether demographic characteristics (such as the parents of pre-school children) or user characteristics (such as users of a GP surgery or tenants living in a particular type of accommodation). Much health based research targets groups in this way, seeking to identify smokers, or those who have recently used a hospital. Many local authorities also use this targeted approach to identify service users with varying experience of the service in question.</td>
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<th>?</th>
<th>Those who represent or speak on behalf of others</th>
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<tr>
<td>For example carers or members of certain voluntary groups or representative bodies. This channel can provide relatively wide access to a range of views. However, care should be taken to ensure that those consulted do represent the views of the target group.</td>
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</table>

As well as being clear about which groups to include in the consultation, it is important to ensure that all of the relevant groups are given equal opportunity to contribute to the exercise. Some differences in views are always likely and not all groups will be able to express their views with the same force or degree of confidence as others. An appropriate choice of method, or range of methods, is essential to ensure that everyone has the chance to have their say. This may mean that break out groups are formed as part of workshop or focus group work, or that special arrangements are made to seek views from groups who may be excluded by the main approach.

For example, the views of rough sleepers will not be obtainable through any home based interviewing approach, although street interviewing may be able to target this group. In one example, a participatory appraisal exercise monitored the characteristics of groups who had come forward to take part. Then a final ‘mopping up’ phase targeted those groups excluded from the first exercise, in this case by seeking lone parents’ views at toddler groups and health centres.

Having defined the target group(s) and selected an appropriate approach to involve this group(s) it will often then be necessary to select a sample of individuals from this group(s) to take part in the consultation. Budget, timescale and ease of access to the target group all have a role to play here in influencing the size and composition of the sample of consultees.

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24 specific techniques can be used to help the less literate or articulate to contribute on the same basis as others.
25 conducted by City of Edinburgh Council in South Edinburgh
When determining how many people to consult and the perceived need for quantitative or qualitative input the decision must be set within a wide range of other considerations. These might include the strategic aims of the organisation, the specific aims of the consultation, the nature of outputs required from the consultation, the way in which these outputs will be used and the resources available. For a variety of reasons, organisations are moving away from the use of large-scale consultation approaches, in favour of more focused approaches such as user panels and focus groups.

The need for large-scale consultation often reflects a requirement for some degree of sub analysis by various sub-samples of the overall population. If there is no intention to compare the views of one group against the other then a smaller sample size is advised. If the views of some sub groups are considered more important, then perhaps the consultation should focus only on these groups, whilst making use of other published data at a Scottish or UK level as a basis for making wider comparisons.

It is not always necessary to consult with a large number of people or to opt for a randomly selected or representative sample – the views of a few well-chosen respondents may provide sufficient insight for your purposes. This report does not attempt to provide details on sampling approaches and techniques. However, one useful reference will be the forthcoming guidance manual for the People’s Panels currently being developed in many of Scotland’s area based Social Inclusion Partnerships may help to address some of the issues concerning the upkeep and maintenance of panels. Some factors influencing sample size and composition include:

<table>
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<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The aims and objectives of the organisation and of the consultation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The nature of inputs required</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes there will be a need to understand the extent of, or patterns of, behaviour and so large-scale consultation may be required. In other instances the need may be to identify the range of different types of attitudes and opinions, or to gain an understanding of them, and so a more qualitative and exploratory approach may be needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The relative importance of the input of certain groups</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This can mean that a highly targeted approach is required to obtain the input of key opinion formers. As such, it may be more appropriate to involve this group in a full and detailed consultation, rather than obtain more general information through a survey approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The differing stages of consultation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It can often be useful to undertake an extensive consultation at the outset to establish baseline information and opinions as the basis of further planning. Progress may then be measured against this to highlight key areas for action and to allow action to be phased accordingly. Later consultation may then represent a scaled down version of the earlier work, monitoring progress or focusing on groups or issues of particular interest.</td>
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26 A range of standard textbooks offers this guidance, including Chisnall P.M. *Marketing Research Analysis and Measurement*. (McGraw Hill)

27 George Street Research *Guidance on People’s Panels in SIPs* for the Scottish Executive. Forthcoming 2000
The political ‘need’ for large scale, representative consultation.
Where an issue is likely to be contentious, widespread consultation that has been designed to be as representative as possible can seek to ensure that all relevant issues have been raised and all relevant views have been listened to.

The resources available for consultation
For example, a multi-million pound programme of expenditure to regenerate an area might seek views from residents of the area and interest groups through a fairly extensive and long term strategic consultation exercise, whilst the refurbishment of a common area in a block of flats would not justify an extensive or wide-scale consultation.

The time available for the consultation
The speed with which outputs are required and will be used should also be considered.

Q: Where To Consult?
There are no hard and fast rules about the best venues for consultation and the choice of venue must reflect the approach employed and the size, location and characteristics of the target group. In general, it is advisable to consult people within a familiar and comfortable environment and this is essential for consultation about personal or sensitive subjects. It is often more productive to consult people in their own homes than to ask them to visit another location. If somewhere outside the home is to be used, an attempt should be made to choose venues likely to be known to consultees, for example community centres or library facilities. If it is necessary to use a facility that your target group is not familiar with, you should ensure that respondents know where the venue is located and how to get there. In some instances it will be appropriate to arrange transport to the venue and to outline what facilities will be on hand for the consultation exercise such as childcare, disabled access etc.

Q: When To Consult?
This research shows that, in general, the decision to consult is made by organisations, although there are many examples where initial awareness raising work by community groups has led in turn to an organisation taking the initiative and commissioning a wider consultation exercise. More commonly, organisations take the lead although there may be opportunities for the actual agenda for the consultation to be influenced from the outset by those being consulted. Such an approach is fundamental to priority search exercises, where debate about priorities is an essential first step in the priority search approach.

Regardless of the point of origin of the decision to consult, it is important that the input provided by consultees can feed into the decision-making or service planning process at the appropriate time. It is only appropriate to consult where the input of consultees can be used. The timing of the consultation will also reflect the nature of the input sought and in some consultation exercises, different types of information are sought from different groups at different stages in the process.

29 A number of the case studies detailed in Chapter 6 have initial stages involving this developmental phase.
30 Fife Council, *Consultation Guidelines: Effective Public Involvement*. 
Consultation can take place either too early or too late. If consultation takes place too soon, it may be that the process has been inadequately planned and that the use of consultation outputs will be unfocussed and ineffective. It is better to wait until the parameters of the exercise have been clearly defined, so that consultees have a clearer view on the range of issues that they are to address and how these will be dealt with. Exploratory work may help set the parameters for the exercise and internal consultation with staff and partners or brainstorming exercises is often a useful first step in this process.

Great care should also be taken to ensure that the consultation does not take place too late. If relevant decisions about policy or practice have already been made for example, is there still an opportunity to influence the outcomes or process for delivering these decisions? If the answer is no, what then is the point of the consultation?

As the Fife Council guide points out:

"Everyone’s time is precious. If you are going to ask someone to give up time for your consultation, you owe it to them to make sure you are using their time well. This means being sure that you really need to know their views, that you will make good use of them, and that you will use a fair and legitimate method to gather them.

People who have been asked for their views have the right to expect that account will be taken of what they have said when a decision is reached on the subject. If there are limits to what changes can be made then you must make these clear to the people you consult. If you know that their views will have no impact on the decision, then you should not consult them”.

If various representative groups are being consulted, it is unrealistic to expect them to be able to provide a response within a short timescale. Often these organisations will wish to discuss their response with members and amongst the committee and this will be built into the normal programme of meetings. As such it can be some weeks or months before the groups will have a chance to debate their response. Equally, individual consultees will have their own preferences in terms of when they can or prefer to offer their views. Any attempt to force a response within too narrow a timeframe can seem arrogant and tokenistic. There are also certain times of the year when consultation should be avoided if possible. In particular the main holiday period over the summer and Christmas should be avoided when possible.

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31 Fife Council, *Consultation Guidelines: Effective Public Involvement*. 
Q: What Resources Are Required?

The resources required to support any consultation exercise include budgets, staff time over the full course of the consultation process, support activities for the analysis of inputs, and for the dissemination and implementation of outputs.

This document provides an indication of the resources required for most of the techniques that can be used and these are detailed in Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’. However, these figures will differ widely depending on the context for the consultation, the way in which the consultation approach is used and why, and they will also date rapidly. The figures should also be seen as highly flexible as approaches can, and should be, adapted and customised according to each organisation’s particular requirements. Whilst it may be possible to use internal resources to reduce the amount spent on various elements of the consultation, these do still incur a cost and full allowance should be made for these elements within the budget allocation.

It is essential to recognise the impact of consultation on staffing resources. Frequently in the course of this study, reference was made to the extent to which organisations had underestimated the length of time required to undertake, analyse and implement various consultation exercises. In Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’, examples have been provided where staff were able to estimate the extent of the time commitment made to various exercises, but as with financial resources, this will differ widely depending on the context.

The amount of time spent by staff on consultation exercises will vary. For example, the establishment of citizens’ panels in many local authorities imposed a heavy burden on staff resources, with this often requiring significant input from those involved (in particular the panel manager) during the early stages of the process. However, much of this time was spent in educating others about the panel and how it could and should be used and therefore the time commitment reduced in later years. The involvement of staff varies over the life of a consultation exercise, often declining as the mechanisms put in place build an impetus of their own. However, maintenance of consultation mechanisms, provision of feedback etc. requires an ongoing commitment of funding and staffing resources.

The analysis phase of any consultation project can take a considerable amount of time and this should be acknowledged in the planning stages. If a large-scale consultation exercise has taken place, the only way to handle the data may be by means of a computer package. This will affect the way that the data are collected and recorded and will require identification of appropriate resources for the data preparation and analysis work. The COSLA document referred to earlier provides some useful insights on how to plan the analysis phase and outlines common mistakes made.

Even small scale in depth consultation can be resource intensive to document and analyse, including the preparation of records of meetings or interviews and their circulation to participants to ensure that they are satisfied with this interpretation of events. More importantly, some method of collating the various views expressed and assigning weight to these must be devised as part of the process of establishing the full picture. When planning consultation, it is always wise to allow extra time at the end for reporting and implementation, and this will have an impact on when the consultation should take place.

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CHAPTER THREE WHY & HOW SCOTTISH ORGANISATIONS CONSULT

This chapter provides a review of the nature and extent of consultation by Scottish agencies. It begins by looking at why these agencies consult and then examines the range of different approaches in use at the end of 1999. Finally, it provides a comparison of consultation practice in Scotland with the guidance identified in Chapter 2, ‘Context’.

3.1 WHY SCOTTISH ORGANISATIONS CONSULT

Consultation by the organisations included in the study had been undertaken for a wide variety of reasons ranging from a fundamental need to meet statutory requirements as well as to involve, engage and empower specific groups or the whole community.

Statutory Requirements

As outlined previously, public sector organisations are increasingly being required by government to encourage organisations to actively engage with their customers and seek their views. Indeed, the need to meet these statutory requirements is often an organisation’s first experience of consultation.

Most of the public sector bodies covered in this research are required to collect monitoring information and opinion data from their users. In some instances this has taken the form of a fairly standardised survey approach, based on guidance issued by the evaluating body on how to undertake such a survey. Less commonly, approaches that were designed essentially to meet statutory means were evolved to provide other useful information. Hence one of the SIPs had conducted a survey of those living in its area but had also undertaken interviews with a control group of neighbouring residents as a means of comparing the views of those within and outwith its area.

Consultation Culture

Some consultation consisted of approaches that have become tried and tested over time. There were instances where consulting with groups had become habitual and a consultation culture within the organisation had developed. Whilst laudable in many ways, care must be taken to ensure that the approaches used are those which are fit for the purpose of the exercise rather than being chosen for familiarity or convenience.

Even within those organisations that displayed a more advanced thinking and approach to the consultation techniques being used, there was clearly other activity taking place at the lower end of the ‘Ladder of Participation’. For example, many local authority service departments made extensive use of self-completion questionnaires to collect information about an aspect of their service. These approaches were seen as being easy to design and administer. As such, they could be very low cost and fulfil the most basic requirement to consult. Yet an analysis of the response rates to these, and of the quality of the response, indicated that other approaches would have been more efficient and effective in terms of the information obtained. Other local authorities used the same type of approach more successfully and with greater innovation, by taking care to ensure that the materials used were well designed and presented.
Further, by arranging appropriate media attention on the issue at the time of the consultation, the context of the consultation could be established, participation encouraged and response rates increased.

Within a consultation culture, there is always a risk of consultation overload. Care must be taken to ensure that each consultation exercises produces new and useful outputs which can be put to use. This is not to undermine the importance of creating an environment within organisations where there is a natural desire to involve and consult. There is, however, a need to ensure that the consultation technique used is chosen carefully and that all the criteria for ensuring good and effective consultation are adhered to on each and every occasion.

**Reinforcement of Existing Ideas / Decisions**

The concern of consultation overload is also relevant where consultation is undertaken simply to assure an organisation that the thinking of its staff or officials is in line with the communities’ views and that the organisation is up to date in this regard. Consulting for this reason was also widespread.

It is a maxim of most consultation exercises that the majority of what is reported back will be in line with any competent organisation’s perceptions of what its users think. The important aspect is, however, the new or unexpected information and how this is used. It must not simply be discounted, as this is where the true value of the consultation lies. Most organisations made full use of this information and were seeking to develop their services to meet any gaps identified. Failure to do so would simply result in the issue being raised again and again in future exercises, as the need will not go away. However, over time, it may become more difficult to address the issue since the community will perceive the organisation as ineffective and disinterested, due to its failure to respond in the past.

**Trying out New Approaches**

Amongst the case study organisations the research revealed a general enthusiasm to experiment with new methods of consulting users and there was an acknowledgement that someone had to pioneer some of the approaches in Scotland. Hence, staff at some of the local authorities interviewed had actively sought a subject for a citizens’ jury and a civic commission rather than having chosen the approach to fit the issue. The desire to use these approaches was a stated strategic aim of the authority. Strictly speaking this does not at first appear to represent good practice in the conventional sense. However, after having decided to use these approaches a number of subject areas were easily identified about which a consultation might not have taken place had more traditional means been the only method of tackling the subject. The benefits were therefore that:

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<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Consultation did take place about an issue that might otherwise have been decided by staff of the organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Staff of the organisation had the opportunity to test out the approaches and develop their experience in the use of a new approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>Consultees were able to provide input in a fresh and innovative way</td>
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</table>
Where authorities had adopted this ‘pilot’ role there was a willingness to share the learning. For example, staff from Clackmannan, East Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, Fife and South Lanarkshire all shared their experiences via seminars and presentations.

More importantly, as far as wider scale implementation of these approaches was concerned, where innovative techniques had been piloted several of the local authorities had produced written guidance on the use of these. These guides detail the lessons learned and provide a basis for others to consider the techniques and use them effectively. As an example, Fife Council produced a detailed account of the Levenmouth Citizens’ Jury.\(^{33}\)

The implementation of many of these approaches had doubtless been facilitated by the growing volume of literature on different consultation methods and the general encouragement within these to try out new approaches.\(^{34}\) Further detail on the implementation of these new approaches in a Scottish context is included in the case studies featured in Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’.

### 3.2 HOW SCOTTISH ORGANISATIONS CONSULT

This research investigated the extent to which different approaches and techniques were being used by public sector organisations in Scotland at the end of 1999. This was clearly a rapidly changing picture. For example, a few months after the audit of approaches took place funding was made available to all area-based SIPs for the establishment of People’s Panels within their areas. Many SIPs have now taken advantage of this funding and are currently recruiting and developing panels in their locality.

Detail on the extent to which public sector organisations in Scotland were familiar with different types of consultation approach was gathered as part of the initial audit of activity undertaken at the commencement of this project. As part of the programme of interviews conducted with different organisations, respondents were asked whether they had heard of a list of 18 different ways of collecting information and consulting users. The list was based on various approaches identified during the preliminary literature review. It included a mix of some of the more traditional methods of consulting users such as surveys and public meetings as well as more innovative approaches such as citizens’ juries and citizens’ panels and the use of IT based means of consultation. In addition to the prompted list of 18 approaches, respondents were provided with the opportunity to identify any other methods they had used. As Table 3.1 indicates, levels of use of the various approaches varied significantly:

Three of the 126 organisations interviewed had not used any method of consultation at that time, nor was there a likelihood of this in the very near future as key staff had still to be appointed to manage this element.

The use of the more traditional form of survey based consultation was widespread amongst those surveyed and almost all the organisations had experience of using this type of approach. The approaches least likely to have been used were the newer and more specialist approaches such as citizens’ juries, mystery shopping, citizens’ panels and deliberative polling. However, this picture is changing rapidly (see for example the development of People’s Panels in area-based SIPs referred to above).

\(^{33}\) Higgins G and Marshall A. *How to Organise a Citizens Jury*. Fife Council

\(^{34}\) See various references in Chapter 2.
Table 3.1 Use of Consultation Techniques

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASE: 126 (ALL RESPONDENTS)</th>
<th>USED TO DATE (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High levels of use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links with community groups</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open/public meetings</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User comments and complaints</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written consultation documents</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newsletters/letters pages</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop sessions</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions and road shows</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot initiatives</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderate levels of use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff suggestion schemes</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth interviews</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT (kiosks, internet, cassettes…)</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low levels of use</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freephone no. for comments</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ panels</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery shopping</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative polling</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ juries</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. Planning for Real, Open Space, omnibus surveys, business panels, public surgeries)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was perhaps not surprising that many of the approaches whose use was most widespread were more informal and qualitative in their nature – for example, building relationships with other community based organisations and inviting comment through the publication of consultation documents. The results also indicated that organisations appeared to be aware of the consultation potential of harnessing comments through a range of sources, such as comments and complaints from users and articles or letters to the press.

As would be expected, given the differences in the ages of organisations, levels of use of the various approaches differed quite markedly when analysed by type of organisation as shown in Table 3.2.

LECs, health boards and local authorities (all of which might be regarded as the more established organisations within the profile of those interviewed) were making use of the widest range of consultation approaches. The four Working for Communities Pathfinders interviewed reported use of different methods of consultation, and this represents quite extensive use of various consultation channels by these organisations when compared with others serving a wider population.
Table 3.2 Use of Consultation Techniques by Type of Organisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BASE: 126 (ALL RESPONDENTS)</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>Health Board</th>
<th>Working for Communities Pathfinder</th>
<th>LEC</th>
<th>Housing Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 (%)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15 (%)</td>
<td>4 (%)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22 (%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### High levels of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>Health Board</th>
<th>Working for Communities Pathfinder</th>
<th>LEC</th>
<th>Housing Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Links with community groups</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open/public meetings</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local newsletters/letters pages</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibitions and road shows</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Variable levels of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>Health Board</th>
<th>Working for Communities Pathfinder</th>
<th>LEC</th>
<th>Housing Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Users comments &amp; complaints</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written consultation documents</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop sessions</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot initiatives</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff suggestion schemes</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth interviews</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT (kiosks, internet, cassettes…)</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Low levels of use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Local Authority</th>
<th>SIP</th>
<th>Health Board</th>
<th>Working for Communities Pathfinder</th>
<th>LEC</th>
<th>Housing Association</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mystery shopping</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deliberative polling</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freephone no. for comments</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ panels</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens’ juries</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (e.g. Planning for Real, Open Space, omnibus surveys, business panels, public surgeries)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Local authorities were more likely to report acting upon comments and complaints from their users, and to have used more innovative approaches such as citizens’ panels and citizens’ juries. Health boards were to the forefront in the use of focus groups, exhibitions and road shows and staff suggestion schemes. This does not suggest a lack of interest in or use of innovative approaches to consultation amongst health boards. Many acted as partners in the use of innovative approaches and had used more traditional approaches in innovative ways.

Amongst the SIPs, much of the consultation undertaken was of the more informal and qualitative type detailed earlier, making use of workshop sessions, public meetings, links with community organisations, written consultation documents, comments and press coverage to provide information. At the time the fieldwork for this research was undertaken there were very low levels of use of citizens’ juries and citizens’ panels. However, as discussed earlier, funding has been made available to area-based SIPs to establish ‘People’s Panels’, and two pilot citizens’ juries and innovative stakeholder juries have also been undertaken. This is likely to result in greater implementation of panel and jury approaches within these partnerships in the near future.
It should be borne in mind that many organisations have not made exclusive use of one approach and, as is stressed in the literature, different approaches have often been combined to ensure effective and comprehensive coverage of all the relevant issues and groups.

For example, as one local authority research commissioner explained:

> I would not use more than one method to find out certain things, because in a way that is a waste of money. What I would do is look at different methods to look at different components – I wouldn’t get focus groups and questionnaires to do the same thing, they would have to compliment each other. We have to be quite efficient in how we collect our information, so I don’t go asking the same questions

Local authority research commissioner

Thus, for example, South Lanarkshire Council has used both qualitative and survey based approaches to look at the issue of budget setting. The qualitative work was conducted initially with a small group of residents to explore understanding of the complexity of the subject and to test the acceptability of various options for budget setting. This led to the development of a questionnaire to test the acceptability of the options generated amongst a wider audience and, in particular, amongst those sub groups most likely to be affected. It also helped to provide guidance on how to communicate details about budget setting to residents more widely and effectively.

As indicated earlier at Chapter 2, in an ideal situation the subject of the consultation would be a matter of joint debate and agreement between organisations and communities. The research, however, largely identified situations where the organisations themselves had identified the issue, although communities were then able to influence the agenda for consultation. Such an approach is fundamental to Priority Search exercises, where debate about priorities is an essential first step in the consultative approach. A number of the case studies detailed in Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’, employed this developmental phase in their initial stages.

The situation with regard to the use of different approaches is changing constantly. Interview responses revealed that many new approaches would be tried by organisations in the future. At the time the audit was carried out, the number of organisations likely to use a citizens’ panel was projected to double, with a further 29 Scottish organisations anticipating the use of this method in the near future. Around 20 hoped to run a citizens’ jury and 16 to make use of internet and web site methods of collecting information and consulting with people. There was wider interest in the use of new technology, with comments made about the possible use of kiosks and opinionmeters, call centres, video and digital and priority search technologies. However, the focus was not entirely on new technologies and there was planned use of more traditional means albeit with variations – for example, cohort approaches to surveys, panels and conferences focused on specific user groups.
3.3 INNOVATIVE USE OF NEW TECHNOLOGY

As well as making use of innovative techniques to consult with communities, there was evidence that Scottish agencies had experimented with and adapted traditional approaches and rendered them more effective by combining them with the use of new information and communications technology.

From the research it was clear that new technology and thinking have affected the use of consultation approaches, engendering wider interest in them and enhancing their effectiveness. A number of organisations interviewed were using computer technology as an integral part of the consultation process. Priority Search software was being widely used not merely to gather information on peoples’ priorities but as a starting point for discussion about how these priorities should be delivered. Hence the software commonly appeared at workshop sessions and was used to identify the issues to be addressed in subsequent focus group sessions. In another example, an organisation described their use of a video diary approach to stimulate discussion at focus group sessions.

We decided to use video diaries, and they used these 13 individuals to record a day in their life. And then to use the videos as a prop for focus groups. We showed the groups the videos to stimulate discussion about the barriers.

The power of these videos amongst the high heid ones from the Health Board, all the suits – the Director of Public Health made the comment about the sheer power of seeing the videos - they galvanised you because it is so real, so in your face, you see the real person behind the words.

Local authority research commissioner

The key principles underlying the use of these approaches are experimentation and preparation. By being innovative in the way that consultation exercises are planned and executed, and by combining approaches that are appropriate to the aims of the consultation process, the effectiveness of the process can be enhanced and the implementation phase can be made easier.
3.4 CONSULTATION THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SCOTLAND

Section 2.4 provided an outline of how consultation might best be approached. Discussions with agencies in Scotland revealed a number of aspects where it had not always been possible to follow these guidelines. Here, some of the more common ways in which consultation practice departs from the theory are discussed to highlight the impact that non-achievement in the area can have on running a successful consultation exercise. Much of this comment was based on the work undertaken with consultees themselves, although it was true also that commissioners of the various projects were also aware of some of these weaknesses.

Communicate the significance and scope of the consultation

The research showed that consultees were often disenchanted with the outcomes of consultation when this was not evident amongst those who had commissioned the research. In part this reflected a failure to communicate to consultees just how important their input had been and how this input had been used. (Related to this was the issue of feedback. Further discussion on the issue of providing feedback to consultees and of how to plan the use of their input follows later.)

Often consultees seemed to have been unclear about how their views were contributing to larger consultation exercises. To take a simple example, one citizens’ panel member commented on the inappropriateness of a questionnaire-based survey to gather his views on budget setting. The individual was unaware that other mechanisms were also being used to gather the qualitative information that he wished to provide.

There should have been a discussion meeting about the spending rather than doing it by questionnaire. If we’d been at groups we could have voiced our opinions and discussed them.

Citizens’ panel member

Providing briefing and feedback on how a specific exercise will feed into a wider programme of consultation or strategy can communicate to consultees that they are playing an important role in a well-planned, comprehensive and worthwhile exercise.

Identify constraints at the outset

Identifying the scope of the exercise and likely constraints that would influence how the outputs of the consultation were used was clearly important to consultees. Where this had not happened, it undermined belief in the exercise.

We formed the proposals to present to the Council. Another meeting has been scheduled next year. But government has turned down the proposals. We should have had a direct discussion with the (Government).

It was satisfying to participate in discussing such an important issue, but also frustrating.

Consultee at civic commission
Be clear about what consultees can contribute (and don’t underestimate their abilities)

For some consultation exercises, it appeared that both consultees and commissioners appeared to have underestimated the role that consultees could play. It became evident from the interviews with consultees that many had derived a great deal of satisfaction and pleasure from their involvement in some of the more participative exercises.

The witnesses came from various departments. We eventually got the decision-makers to talk to us. They had sent other people to start with who could not make decisions. Word got around that we needed the people at the top. It got much better when they realised that we were asking relevant questions and we needed answers and not fobbing off

Consultee at citizens’ jury

I think they thought they were going to have to lead the group through, and were surprised at our quick grasp of it. The group would have liked a bit more freedom to structure it

Consultee at civic commission

Consultees quickly gained confidence and demonstrated themselves capable of making a valuable contribution to the consultation exercise. It was important that those managing the consultation realised that this would happen and were equipped to deal with the demands made by consultees as they gained in confidence.

Give all consultees a chance to contribute

Consultation exercises should always be facilitated in such a way that those invited to take part may develop and put forward their personal views and opinions. In a simple example, this can be achieved by breaking larger groups into smaller groups (allowing more people to participate) or by allowing time for further debate in rounding up sessions. The use of models and visual techniques can also be helpful in accessing the views of less articulate or less confident consultees and Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’, outlines a few approaches that facilitate this method of working.

They spilt us into groups and then we all got back together so we were able to participate well.

Consultee at community conference

Be flexible

Research commissioners appeared to recognise the importance of adopting an appropriate approach to specific issues. It was emphasised in study meetings that whilst large scale and robust consultation was an important part of strategic development, local problems and issues needed a more flexible approach or the opportunity for any community input might be lost.

We are almost in a position where we are having to slightly compromise our professional stance by saying we need quick results, and we need findings that are going to be recognised at a local level. We are looking for techniques that we feel are robust, but there is no way that you can jump through academic hoops. It’s a constraint that we operate in, which needs quick results, because if you commission researchers to do a piece of work and it takes them 18 months, well the local agenda has moved on.

Local authority research commissioner
Recognise that consultation needs to be planned and timed carefully

As indicated earlier, it is essential to build adequate time for the consultation into all aspects of the process. Consultees were sensitive to instances where the ‘fieldwork’ phase had been hurried, as well as having their own restrictions on availability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It should have been over 2 weeks rather than 1 week. It was a bit too intensive.</th>
<th>Sometimes I felt it was difficult to put points forward due to a lack of time and breadth of topics. It was frustrating just because there didn’t seem enough time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultee at citizens jury</td>
<td>Consultee at civic commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consultees also found it irritating to have their work interrupted by foreseeable delays such as elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>There could have been a more immediate meeting after the 3-day consultation. But the elections put everything back. It would have helped to keep the momentum going as people have tended to drift away.</th>
<th>I’m angry about the fact that they kept putting back when it was going before Council.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultee at civic commission</td>
<td>Consultee at civic commission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Agency staff too recognised that they could make mistakes and commission work at an inappropriate time. Often their lack of preparation became evident only after the process had commenced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In all good faith that work was commissioned and it wasn’t until the work was underway that we realised that we hadn’t got all the information that was necessary to do an impact assessment. I’m not sure where the problem lies – did we not realise that the methodology was not sufficiently well developed or were we maybe just premature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local authority research commissioner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be recognised also that the development of an environment in which effective and appropriate consultation can take place might take years to achieve. For example, the principle of community consultation has been developed over a number of years in one of the SIPs taking part in this research. Since establishment, this partnership has sought to identify voluntary and community groups within its territory, to engage them in a dialogue and establish a network of local fora so that it can build up a holistic picture of the issues affecting the whole community. A recent community conference demonstrated how far the partnership had come in getting organisations to work together:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We managed to get other people involved, you know representatives of other interested groups outwith the usual partnership as well as within. We had more members there than we had in a past. You could see it as the whole rather than isolated areas without relation to each other.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultee at community conference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feed back appropriate information

Obtaining feedback about the consultation was important to consultees. When asked if they regarded receiving feedback from the exercise as important, 70% of consultees rated it as such with just 22% disagreeing.

Despite both consultees and organisations appearing to agree on the importance of offering feedback, not all the consultees interviewed felt that they had been given sufficient feedback with just 44% of those interviewed saying that they had received some feedback after the exercise. Amongst those who had received information, most felt that it had been sufficiently detailed (77%), and that it was a good reflection of what had been said or decided (72%). However, the speed of response was more likely to be criticised; only 58% stated that the feedback had been provided as quickly as they would have liked.

In particular, consultees appeared to doubt the relevance of their input, where the feedback was not as detailed as they would have liked.

We needed better quality feedback. There was no comprehensive response, just a thank you letter saying they had taken things on board but no specifics. We hoped for more action, but I saw little evidence. It was more just a fudging of conclusions  

*Consultee at meeting with business community*

I believe that this is a worthwhile way of the local authority involving the local community. They do have to mean it and do it throughout all departments. Plan it properly and genuinely. Show if ideas have been taken on board or rejected. Rejection should be explained.

*Consultee at community conference*

Consultees were very sensitive to any indication that implied that their views had not been taken seriously or given sufficient weight.

Our recommendations were to be presented to the Council, but the meeting was cancelled. It has been disheartening not to be able to go forward. I feel that really, all our efforts have not been taken as seriously as they should be  

*Consultee at civic commission*

The final draft did not have anything in it about car parking in the town. I feel the Council should have put all their plans on hold until we had had our civic commission. They have gone ahead with bus lanes that no one wants.

*Consultee at civic commission*

The last information I got was talking about neighbourhood parks and recreation grounds. £8 million being spent. That decision had already been made and we were just giving our views about something that had already been decided.

*Citizens’ panel member*
Consultees were often seeking more detailed feedback than was provided in the briefing information or short summaries of key points arising from the exercise they had received. As discussed in Chapter 5, ‘Evaluating Consultation’, respondents were more concerned that the views that they had expressed had been acknowledged, rather than to read summary information or about the consensus view. Timing was also important to maintain impetus in the consultation and to reassure consultees that action was being taken.

There was also recognition of the importance of agencies making information about their consultations available to others:

‘Information … ought generally to be published, … not only because planning authority services need to be accountable for their actions, but also because residents and the public … need relevant information, published in an attractive format, about how the authority works and the issues it seeks to tackle.’

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CHAPTER FOUR  PLANNING CONSULTATION

This chapter begins by looking at the extent to which agencies plan their consultation and gives some examples of the approaches used. A later section considers joint working, both in terms of partnership working between agencies and in terms of adopting a multi-faceted approach to meeting consultation needs.

4.1 STRATEGIC PLANNING

Undoubtedly, strategic planning of consultation was one of the big issues facing organisations as they dealt with statutory requirements to consult and a desire to tailor their service delivery more effectively to targeted user groups. It was also perhaps an issue that had not been given adequate time and resources within larger organisations as pressure of work and timescales force the pace of consultation along.

Despite evidence that a number of agencies have developed consultation strategies, in practice the actual planning and co-ordination of consultation programmes may have received less attention as the enthusiasm to maintain momentum has pushed along the consultation process. In addition, in some agencies the desire of individual officers or groups to pursue individual consultation exercises pertaining to their particular service or area of interest, without locating this within a wider consultation framework, has resulted in some duplication of time and resources. It may also convey a confused message to consultees and ultimately lead to a reduced enthusiasm to participate in the consultation processes.

A number of organisations had grown increasingly aware of the lack of formalised and effective procedures for managing their current consultation programme and its future planning. As such, there were signs of some attempts to “rein-in” and better co-ordinate the range of individual consultation exercises through increased forward planning and/or better sharing of information within and between agencies. COSLA\textsuperscript{36} have identified some of the approaches currently being used to share information and facilitate the planning process within different organisations:

“Approaches to achieving co-ordination of effort include the setting up of co-ordination teams / working groups, provision of written guidelines on standards etc, use of electronic bulletin boards and optimal use of central support services (information gathering/dissemination, facilitation, technical advice etc)”.

Fife Council, for example, was developing a consultation diary. Service departments within the Council would be encouraged to record the consultations that they were carrying out so that others would know what had already been done. The hope was that when departments were thinking of carrying out an exercise, they would check to see if the knowledge or information they were seeking already existed or if they could ‘piggy-back’ their approach onto another initiative that was planned. This would help prevent both the over consultation of particular groups and duplication of time and resources.

The City of Edinburgh Council has established a consultation database that allows it to co-ordinate consultation within departments and across the Council. The database stores

\textsuperscript{36} COSLA (1998) \textit{Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods}
information about past, present, on-going and intended projects for all activities carried out by different branches of the Council. The database can be accessed via the Internet, Capinfo or by a dedicated policy officer within the Council. Through some of these channels it was possible for the public to access the information and to establish what consultation was planned for their area or in particular fields of interest as well as seeing the results of past exercises. The Council also holds regular meetings with representatives from each of the Service Departments in attendance. This allows co-ordination of approaches between departments and an exchange of information. The Council has also recently introduced a Consultation Best Practice Package, which outlines corporate procedures and practical guidance, identifies databases that can be used to co-ordinate and ensure co-operation in consultation and encourage self assessment, monitoring and evaluation. The Highlands and Islands Enterprise Network makes use of an electronic notice board facility to provide a link between its Local Enterprise Companies.

Other examples of attempts to co-ordinate consultation activity typically focused on the appointment of an individual or department for whom research or consultation was a key responsibility. In the main this person / department would know most of what was going on within their organisation, although there was acknowledgement that some exercises would ‘slip through the net’.

There was much greater evidence of planning in relation to individual consultation vehicles, in particular with regard to the use of citizens’ panels (where under-usage may limit cost effectiveness, over-usage may impact on response rates and either will reduce the effectiveness of consultation). South Lanarkshire Council, for example, were able to provide us with a proposed programme of use for their panel which ran from January 1999 through to September 2001 – although towards the end of this time period, fewer exercises had been noted to allow new issues to be accommodated. As panels achieve increasing popularity with those organisations that develop and maintain them, close control and effective planning of their use will become a major priority.

Planning consultation may take place both internally within the organisation as well as externally by making use of formal consultation channels and groups to discuss plans for consultation. For example, City of Edinburgh Council\(^37\) expands upon the benefits of collaboration in their guide to service users and stresses the role that community fora or councils should have in helping to develop the consultation.

\(^37\) City of Edinburgh Council, *Consultation Matters: A Guide to Consultation*
4.2 JOINT WORKING

Joint working between agencies appears to have expanded considerably over the past few years. The concept of partnership was now firmly entrenched within the working practices of most of the organisations involved in the survey of commissioning organisations.

The Benefits of Joint Working

There are a number of benefits accruing to organisations that work in partnership with others and consultees may also benefit from the process. Organisational benefits include:

- **sharing expertise**
- **sharing resources** - potentially a greater proportion of the process can be internalised if resources such as analysis packages, print or creative departments and administrative resources can be shared or called upon to carry a project forward
- **sharing costs** - partners can contribute to the cost, making consultation more affordable
- **reducing timescales** - with more individuals playing a role in the process
- **a holistic approach** - the exercise will be more holistic in its inception, planning and implementation
- **minimising conflict** - joint working should minimise the potential for conflicting views and priorities to emerge between agencies if there is effective communication between the partner agencies
- **maximising action** - the range of potential responses to the consultation outputs can be maximised, as they reflect the varied remits of different partner organisations.

Consultation Joint Working in Scotland

As an example, one of the local authorities in Scotland was looking at social exclusion and the issues that might affect the health of the socially excluded. The planned consultation took the form of a partnership between the local authority and the Health Board. However, once the consultation process began, it became evident that a number of other key aspects of lifestyle were inextricably linked with the health issue such as transportation and employment. Other voluntary sector organisations then became involved.

Some of the above will also translate into consultee benefits in that a better and more coherent debate about issues can take place as well as a more holistic response to these issues. Most importantly, joint working may relieve the consultation burden experienced by some communities, and which is most apparent within smaller areas, local communities and minority groups.

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39 this depends upon the effectiveness of the joint working arrangements – timescales can also be lengthened if there is a need for individual partners to consult within their own organisations before a decision can be made.
In many of the examples of partnership working featured in this study, the local authority has taken a lead role (in the eyes of consultees and as reported by local authorities themselves), reflecting their central service role in many areas:  

“because of the central role that knowledge plays in the authority’s work, planning departments sometimes take a wider research and intelligence function – on behalf of the authority as a whole or in partnership with other large scale public oriented organisations (i.e. local health authorities), or they develop strong links with local universities on matters of mutual interest”

However, this does not in any way undermine the contribution that other agencies make to joined-up working and this study found little evidence of any dispute between organisations as to who took the lead role. In fact, with LECs in particular, there was evidence that they often initiated projects and having launched them successfully, then adopted the role of facilitator, ensuring the projects continued under the direction of others – either another public agency or within the private sector.

Joint working also offers potential for conflict and it is necessary to have some mechanism in place to identify and weight aims and priorities and to agree appropriate methods of responding to the results of consultation.

One of the fundamental issues in social inclusion partnerships is firstly it gives local structures a capacity to identify and hang onto their local needs and to act upon them. But the partners on those also belong to the Health Board and Council or whatever and they have all got their strategies and they have all got their professionals behind them who are pushing to implement those strategies.

I think there are going to be substantial tensions there once all the partnerships have got their strategies developed, their action plans identified and it is going to be interesting to see, in a sense, the relative influence that there is informing those strategies. And you know there are quite a lot of interesting tensions there and at what point do those professionals feel more committed to the level of communities than they do to their parent organisations?

Health Board research commissioner

Despite evidence of growth in partnership consultation, it was difficult to quantify the incidence and extent of multi-agency working due to the wide range of both formal and more loosely structured arrangements that were in place. In addition, joint working arrangements tended to be fluid, developing in response to specific projects. Within the context of agencies with multiple responsibilities, such as local authorities and health boards, some parts of the organisations may have been working on a joint initiative whilst others were proceeding with their own projects.

The most formalised partnership arrangements between agencies often focused on shared funding of, and access to, pre-recruited panels as a cost effective means of partner organisations undertaking consultation with the public. For example, the citizens’ panel established by South Lanarkshire Council in partnership with Greater Glasgow Health Board, Lanarkshire Development Agency, Lanarkshire Health Board and Scottish Homes and managed by a steering group with representatives from each organisation.

On a less formal, albeit important basis, this study revealed a wealth of co-operation between agencies in terms of secondments, (such as police staff seconded to local authorities), sharing of information and, as a further example, provision of “expert witnesses” to assist with citizens’ juries. A number of respondents cited a growing awareness of the value of consultation, and increased knowledge of a range of alternative techniques, as encouraging colleagues in other agencies to assist with the provision of informed and expert opinion regarding consultation.

Related to this point, some respondents highlighted the benefits of tapping into the knowledge and experience of colleagues in other organisations when evaluating consultation methods or planning to use them for the first time. There were many instances when local authorities in particular had shared experiences and information or even allowed shadowing of consultation processes by a colleague from another organisation. In addition, some research commissioners commented spontaneously on the need for new and different fora to encourage feedback and debate on different approaches and, for example, the exchange of information on practitioners who were known to have competence in specific techniques.

To this end, organisations such as COSLA and the Scottish Local Government Information Unit (SLGIU) have already played a significant role in collating information and making it available to members and others. This document will also contribute to the practice of sharing information.

**Effective Joint Working**

Effective joint working in the context of consultation is widely thought to be dependent on two key factors;

- the extent to which formalised administration and management systems are agreed, planned and implemented and,

- the extent to which there is a genuinely agreed and shared vision between partner organisations.

There will always be a degree of trade-off between the inherent economies of jointly funded consultation initiatives and the need to compromise between the ‘ideal’ aims and solutions of each partner organisation. For example, in setting up panels for consultation purposes it has to be acknowledged that the criteria for selecting and structuring a panel can vary between individual partners and that it is rarely feasible to take all these criteria into account or to give them equal weighting.
The use of a steering group, with representation from each partner organisation, can be helpful in planning both the set-up of the consultation process and agreeing and scheduling future use. There are instances where shared panels, for example, have proved such a popular means of consulting users that the level of demand for surveys via the panel has been far greater than would be feasible or appropriate over a given period. Hence, the need for appropriate management structures to be put in place in order to control the use of these research mechanisms in a manner that is acceptable to all partners.

It is also acknowledged that there should be a shared vision amongst partner organisations in order to maximise the effectiveness of joint consultation initiatives. As noted below even where there appears to be a shared vision, in practice there is sometimes a need for flexibility in approach to co-operative ventures.

The Vision for Edinburgh Consultation (about which details of the approach used are provided later in this chapter) made the following recommendations on how to improve joint working.
VISION FOR EDINBURGH CONSULTATION

RECOMMENDATIONS ON PRACTICAL MEASURES TO IMPROVE JOINT WORKING:

- Closer joint working and better liaison between existing partnerships
- Good practice guidelines for joint working and partnerships
- Information sharing and improved communication between organisations
- Consolidation and pooling of efforts and resources
- Alignment of strategic planning between organisations.
- More work through inter-agency teams at local level
- Need to link city wide and community planning

4.4 COMBINING CONSULTATION APPROACHES

Consultation need not make exclusive use of one approach or another. In a number of the case studies followed during the research, and some of those detailed in Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’, different consultation approaches were combined to ensure effective coverage of all issues and groups. A simple example of combining approaches was through complimentary use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of consultation.

Although there may be statutory requirements for some agencies to produce robust statistical data in order to measure and monitor progress on pre-determined indicators, many users are conscious of the limitations and risks of using quantitative techniques in isolation. Whilst quantitative approaches can answer the questions ‘how much?’ they can seldom help to answer the question ‘why?’

Having already funded a very large scale household survey, operations survey, a business survey, a voluntary sector survey and there’s an evaluation framework - you know all this is feeding into the development of the strategic objectives. But at the end of the day we have to recognise that quantitative techniques have limitations. I have to say that I have my own reservations about this idea of developing population panels because at the end of the day you are still stuck with the same problems of producing just quantitative data, you are not really getting behind it.

Health Board research commissioner

Whilst inappropriate use of a quantitative approach or failure to use an appropriate range of consultation techniques may be partly at fault, the need to gather information to meet statutory requirements is also an issue. Such consultation often consists of simple measurement using rating scales and it is possible to produce results that show the organisation as providing a good or poor quality service. However, a more detailed
exploration of aspects of these services, and the use of more open questions or qualitative techniques, could enhance this picture and show why these ratings were obtained. Resource constraints mean that producing this monitoring information may limit an organisation’s potential to undertake more detailed and focused consultation.

There are many occasions when a range of approaches is required in order to take account of a wide variety of ‘user’ groups. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, a combined approach may help to secure the input of those people, or groups of people, who are often excluded by conventional consultation techniques. The City of Edinburgh Council commissioned one such exercise on behalf of a wide range of partnership organisations. Details of the approach used are shown below:

## VISION FOR EDINBURGH CONSULTATION

The aim of the approach was to produce a shared Vision for Edinburgh. A draft consultation document was produced and used to obtain input from various groups using a range of appropriate techniques:

- Residents’ views were sought through a telephone poll of a subset of the council’s citizens’ panel members. Copies of the consultation document were also made available in public places, on the CAPINFO information network, the Internet and through advertising in local media. Residents could offer their views on the document by use of a freephone facility or in writing, (using a freepost address or by e-mail).

- The views of representative organisations such as the local chamber of commerce, voluntary organisations, community councils, businesses, local tourist bodies and other membership groups were sought through a series of organised presentations. A presentation of the document was made and comments collected after each event.

- Formal consultation took place through a programme of qualitative research based on two workshop sessions, (consisting of a presentation beforehand, focus group sessions and a feedback session), and separate focus group sessions with representatives of small businesses in the city. Those attending the workshop sessions were drawn from tenants’ and residents’ associations, community councils, representative organisations, housing associations, partnerships, young people and public agencies.

External agencies were commissioned to conduct the qualitative element and to handle telephone calls and conduct research with the panel members. Other elements of the consultation were organised and carried out by staff of the Council. The outcomes of the consultation provided input at a variety of levels. Comment was obtained on:

- the content of the Vision document
- the nature of community planning
- the need for joint working to achieve the Vision
- and the nature of the consultation exercise itself.
CHAPTER FIVE EVALUATING CONSULTATION

5.1 WHY EVALUATE?

This report illustrates the range of different types of consultation activity taking place in Scotland at the present time and the range of aims and objectives associated with this activity. Consultation may seek to inform policy making, improve service planning, help with performance monitoring, identify community needs and priorities, engage and empower communities. However, to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of consultation in meeting these aims and objectives, and to plan how to improve future consultation, a thorough evaluation of the consultation process, its outputs and outcomes is required.

Most of the evaluation work undertaken to date focused on process i.e. the consultation technique itself or, to a lesser extent, on the short-term outcomes of the consultation process. Much of this evaluation was of an informal and subjective nature. These perspectives are important, particularly in relation to more innovative approaches to consultation. Only by evaluating each consultation exercise in terms of its gathering appropriate inputs, delivering usable outputs, value for money etc. will knowledge and understanding about the effectiveness of consultation techniques be developed. An informed decision on whether to use an approach, with or without refinements and adaptations, in the future can then be made. For this reason it is helpful if process evaluations provide a record that others can access on the effectiveness or otherwise of an approach within a particular context and even perhaps details of how this approach could be adapted and used more effectively. The consultation process should not be seen as rigid and unchanging over time or within different contexts. Flexibility, ‘fitness for purpose’ and continuous development are key to the success of consultation. It is unlikely that an organisation will get it right first time and there may be a need to change the approach used or to adapt approaches depending upon the context for the consultation.

This research found limited evidence of evaluation of the longer-term, higher level outcomes of consultation or, indeed, of a formal, planned approach to evaluation amongst consulting organisations in the study. Evaluation is a key element in allowing consultation to be improved upon and to deliver more effective outcomes and should be an essential consideration in consultation planning and design. There appeared to be a significant challenge in developing a culture of evaluation within consulting organisations, and in ensuring that adequate resources were allocated to this at appropriate stages in the consultation process.

It should be recognised that the aims and objectives of those being consulted may differ significantly from those of the organisations doing the consulting. Moreover, the relative importance attached to the different types and levels of outcome from the consultation process may also differ, to the extent that consultees may in fact attach no value to some outcomes which consulting organisations regard as key to effectiveness. Recognition of these different, but important, perspectives must be an inherent part of any evaluation. This research gathered the views of both consulting organisations and consultees about their experiences of consultation and their assessment of its effectiveness, and these are presented in sections 5.2 and 5.3.
5.2 THE ORGANISATIONS’ PERSPECTIVE

The extent to which organisations in this study had attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of consultation was variable, although there was widespread acknowledgement of the importance of evaluation. Clearly this was a situation wherein theory and practice diverged:

\[\text{when you have the choice of getting on with the next thing or thinking back over the last one, the new one takes priority}\]

Local authority respondent

Much of any assessment of effectiveness that did take place was anecdotal and process-based, gleaned from recall of the actual consultation exercise amongst the individuals concerned.

**Process & Inputs**

The telephone audit of consultation commissioners revealed that over half of them regarded the input provided by consultees as useful and a further 30% stated that it had ‘met their needs’. Just over 10% claimed they had received a ‘huge amount of information and views’ and over 40% felt this information reflected wide perceptions from different groups of people. Where problems were identified in terms of consultation inputs, these related to dealing with contradictory information and unconstructive comments, which led to problems in developing usable outputs from the information provided. This highlighted a need to think carefully at the outset about how consultation inputs would be gathered and analysed, and the resulting outputs put to use. As stated earlier it is important that consideration is given at the outset as to the priority to be given to the views of differing groups, as consensus is unlikely.

This research revealed a strong desire on the part of consulting organisations to make even greater use of consultation in the future, in particular by using new techniques in association with other more conventional approaches. On the whole, consultation commissioners were likely to make further use of most approaches they had used, making only slight modifications as a result of their previous experience. Suggested modifications to the process tended to focus on opening up consultation to other groups or extending the time allowed for the consultation and implementation phases.

Within organisations there was clearly a need for some form of consistent and centralised approach to consultation, evaluation and information sharing. As a short-term solution it would be possible to use an initiative such as Fife Councils’ consultation diary to at least identify those within the authority that had experience of using a particular technique, so that others may turn to them for advice. However, although obtaining information on a personal basis may prove more productive, written evaluations are likely to reach a wider audience.

In some cases, detailed accounts of the use of innovative approaches to consultation were written up by those involved in commissioning and managing the consultation, based on their own experiences. However, there remains a risk that this knowledge and experience of innovative techniques will not be updated or added to, and that evaluation of the consultation process will go little way beyond detailing the initial lessons learned from the exercise. In the consultation guides produced by several of the local authorities included in the research, attempts had been made to outline how to run different types of consultation events and to highlight pitfalls based on practical experience of these techniques. However, this information must be set against the context of any proposed consultation, and the concept of ‘fit for purpose’ must be adhered to at all times.
Outputs

Overall, three fifths of all consulting organisations described their consultation as effective. This finding was interesting in that effectiveness tended to be defined in terms of the breadth of community or target group involvement with the exercise rather than the outcome achieved. It seems to suggest that most consulting organisations placed a higher value on the gathering of views from those targeted for consultation than on the quality of the views obtained, and therefore the validity of the consultation could be undermined by the perceived lack of representativeness of consultees. To a greater extent, those commissioning consultation assessed their effectiveness from a more ‘quantitative’ perspective, judging them in terms of coverage and scale, and placing less emphasis on qualitative or higher level outcomes from the process. Yet, as discussed later in this chapter it was those consultation approaches involving active engagement and participation and seeking greater depth and quality of input that were seen as most effective by consultees in the process.

In contrast, a number of consulting organisations referred in particular to the effectiveness of citizens’ juries, civic commissions and citizens’ groups. It was agreed that these approaches had generated a wide range of outputs, although only some rather than all recommendations emerging from the process had been implemented.

13% of consulting organisations regarded consultation as ineffective overall. The types of consultation likely to be rated as least effective were events such as exhibitions and road shows, obtaining responses to written consultation documents, and workshop sessions. The weaknesses of these approaches were seen to be the poor public response or level of attendance at the consultation event. In particular, there was a feeling that the views of certain groups had not been obtained during the consultations concerned.

There were also comments from officials that it had proven difficult to obtain input on the full range of issues that they wished to discuss and that single, more contentious issues had dominated. Thus ‘minority’ issues had not been adequately addressed by the consultation.

Related to the above, it was also felt that not all the relevant information had been collected during the consultation and in a few instances it was later realised that different questions should have been asked. Recognition of these problems, even at this late stage, was still vitally important and could usefully feed into the overall evaluation process. If the consulting organisation learned the lessons from evaluation it might be able to avoid potential pitfalls when planning and adapting consultation in the future.

The majority of commissioners claimed to have produced a final report detailing consultation outputs, and two fifths had used these outputs in the development of strategy or for longer-term planning. Some organisations were still processing the outputs or actively consulting about the issue.
Value for Money

Organisational perceptions of the value for money of consultation were investigated, in the absence of data on resource inputs to, or measurable outputs and outcomes from, the consultation process. This revealed that the vast majority of consultation commissioners regarded them as having provided good value for money. This perception of ‘good value for money’ seemed to take account of the cost of the consultation per se in combination with the response rate or breadth of coverage that the exercise had obtained.

Doubt was expressed by one organisation about the value for money of a freephone telephone number used as a vehicle for collecting responses from the public. Further concerns were expressed during a case study interview relating to a citizens’ jury. Staff in the commissioning organisation reported that it had ‘not been worth the bother’ when disruption to other activity was considered, despite having produced useful outputs. These examples indicate that perceived ‘poor value for money’ reflected the considerable time and staff resources that had been spent on administering the consultation.

There was clearly a difficulty for organisations in assessing the amount of internal resources that would be required to undertake consultation. There was a lot of comment that these resources were significantly underestimated in planning the consultation, particularly with regard to the input required from the lead officer or project manager. Some consultation identified in the study had run over a period of several years and had represented a full time commitment for a member of staff for much of that time. In other instances consultation approaches had taken a considerable amount of time to establish before a lower level of commitment from staff was needed. In Chapter 6, ‘Guidance on Consultation Techniques’ more detail is provided about the resources required for specific approaches and indicate where possible the likely cost of adopting these approaches.

Outcomes

In many organisations, consultation represented just one of many inputs into a complex and continuously evolving policy process rather than leading directly to specific outcomes in the short term, and was therefore very difficult to measure. As a consequence, effectiveness was rarely viewed in terms of the higher level impacts of consultation. Few organisations could actually state whether consultation had directly brought about improvements in policy decision making, service provision or priority setting.

Throughout this research it was apparent that consulting organisations were of the firm belief that they had derived significant benefit from consultation. Such a perspective was not entirely surprising but it was not based on any systematic assessment of the impact of the consultation or its effectiveness in meeting its original aims. Few of the organisations were in a position to provide formal, written evaluations of the consultations undertaken. In one or two cases, evaluation reports were being prepared but they were not available for review as part of this exercise. It appeared to be more often the case that the intention was there or that, although some of the information had been collated, it was not (yet) available in a presentable form.

Many organisations were also firmly of the belief that consultation, and in particular the more participative approaches to consultation, was bringing about indirect, longer-term benefits to both the organisation and the community. Such consultation was seen as leading to greater engagement and involvement of the community and new levels of communication between
the organisation and those it served. Again, much of the evidence provided by organisations for this was anecdotal in nature or imputed from the apparent willingness of consultees to stay involved with different consultations for what were often considerable periods of time.

In one of the partnership areas in the study, the organisation had built consultation through a programme of events designed to attract community representatives. Those attending had been formed into area fora with a geographic structure that represented the structure on the ground. Each area forum then sent two representatives to the partnership forum. Over time this forum had begun to work more as a common entity.

The fora regularly received input from others outside the structure and were becoming increasingly effective at tapping into other sources of information. Thus, at a recent community conference about a range of social issues, the conference was well attended by young people, reflecting the deliberate recruitment of some who had not previously had any association with the partnership via youth workers. Over time there had been a re-classification of community members as full partners within the various strategy groups reflecting a demand from community representatives that they should be accorded this status.

This process of developing communication and understanding between the organisation and community was not always a straightforward one. One organisation had entered into a dialogue with their users at a point when, for commercial reasons, they had decided on a course of action that their users were not likely to support. The consultation had, therefore, been somewhat contentious, although a greater understanding and willingness to listen had developed between the organisation and its users as a result.

Amongst organisations, however, there was often a lack of perceived need for an evaluation of outcomes at this level. There was a strong conviction from the commissioners of most of the consultation that it had been effective (on their terms) and therefore no further justification was required. ‘Softer’ outcomes of consultation such as empowerment and confidence building are difficult to measure in any sense, whilst others may build very slowly and are unlikely to be discernible in any immediate post consultation evaluation.

Other unexpected and indirect benefits had also resulted from consultation. As an example, one of the local authorities developed a board game to be used to help with its budget setting consultations. Not only was the approach enjoyed by consultees and was likely to be used by
other local authorities, but it had a direct impact on the approach used by council officials in their budget setting task, building their confidence in their ability to make suggestions to elected officials:

_The game showed that consultees were prepared to pay more for leisure services, for example, although libraries were seen as the exception. Our recommendations, based on this work, will be going to Committee in January or February, when the budgets for the individual services have been finalised._

_Another main impact is that the findings largely reinforce what the staff has been doing in budgetary terms and gives the confidence to go to the elected members._

_Finance department official_

**Limitations**

Organisations could however more clearly identify those factors that had limited the effectiveness of the consultation they had undertaken:

- on many occasions, the action required to respond to the consultation and bring about effective outcomes fell outwith the powers or remit of the organisation. This was a common constraint on all, but seemed to be most limiting for those public sector organisations such as LECs and housing associations which also operated with a ‘commercial’ agenda.

_Consultation is not seen as a one way process. People have to be updated and consulted in order to make informed choices. On occasion, however, recommendations might be in conflict with statutory responsibilities._

_research commissioner_

It is therefore essential to provide a full explanation to consultees about what is achievable from the consultation at the outset and pursue ways of working in partnership with other agencies to enhance the scope of possible outcomes from the exercise.

- The political acceptability of some consultation findings was also an issue. For example, in some local authorities, elected members occasionally made use of their status as higher level decision-makers in the face of conflicting recommendations arising from consultation.

- In some instances the value of the consultation and strength of its impact on wider policy and practice was undermined by the perception that it was not representative of the views of all groups. This was to some extent a recruitment or sampling issue but it also indicated a need to educate those in the organisation about the varying roles of different consultation techniques and the nature of the outputs that can be generated from them.
5.3 THE CONSULTEES’ PERSPECTIVE

A programme of interviews with consultees was undertaken for this study to explore the expectations and experiences of the consultation process from their perspective and compare these with those of the commissioning organisations.

Why Get Involved?

Reasons for involvement in consultation tended to be:

- **Issue based** - wishing to educate and inform the commissioning organisation about issues that affected the community with a view to provoking action

Where consultees had participated on this basis, the issue discussed tended to be very localised, such as a need for traffic calming or concerns about street lighting in an area. Those taking part on the basis of a specific issue tended to hold strong views about this issue and were seeking the opportunity to have their views heard on the subject. This immediately raises a question as to the capacity of these consultees for representing the views of their community, and care must be taken to ensure that as wide a perspective as possible is secured by the consultation.

- **Knowledge based** – wishing to enhance individuals’ understanding of how the organisation operated and what it was trying to achieve.

Involvement for these reasons often seemed to arise through some other connection with the organisation concerned. This was a prime motivation, for example, for business people’s involvement in some consultation exercises, where initially the opportunity to be involved was seen as a networking opportunity or a chance to get to know officials working within a particular area. The same networking motivation often lay behind the involvement of those representing local interest groups, although a general interest in how public services and agencies operated was also a motivating influence.

Most consultees who had participated in consultation exercises for this reason claimed to have gained significantly from them in their understanding of how the consulting organisation operated and how they could work better with the organisation. However, both the consulting organisation and its consultees benefited from this shared learning. Often this had fed into a more effective relationship between the individual and the organisation and would ensure that they worked together more productively in the future.

> I have become more aware of the matters the Council is involved in. Since then I have thought more about community issues.  
>  
> Citizens’ panel member

- **Community based** – driven by a general desire to do good for the community.

Those motivated by a desire to represent the needs of, and serve, the community were drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. The recruitment approach used for consultation was key to securing the involvement of this type of participant, in that some would become involved
due to the persuasiveness of the approach without any prior experience of this type of participation. Well-designed and written recruitment materials and/or a skilled recruiter were often invaluable in extending the reach of consultation exercise to consultees participating on this basis.

Some participants had discovered new opportunities to participate in the community. For example, recently retired people had made use of their greater leisure time by getting involved in this way whilst others saw such involvement as a good way of extending friendship networks.

Other secondary motivations described by consultees included a simple desire to try something new (although those participating for these reasons often seemed unsure about the objectives of the exercise and their role in it) and as a conduit to provide information to others. The latter were very similar in their characteristics to those who participated due to an active interest in the issue themselves.

**Outcomes**

Unlike the consulting organisations, consultees generally had less of a feel for the impact of their involvement on the policy and practice of the organisation and just under half the consultees felt that they had been informed at the outset of their involvement how their input would be used. They were, however, able to comment on the impact of the consultation on them as individuals and on their experience of the actual consultation technique itself.

**Learning and Understanding**

Nearly two thirds of all consultees who expressed an opinion felt that they were a lot more knowledgeable about the consulting organisation following the consultation. Anecdotally, the extent to which this knowledge had been enhanced varied with the nature of the consultation exercise. Consultation which adopted a more qualitative approach, and in particular the more participative approaches such as civic commissions, conferences or workshops were regarded by consultees as most informative. These approaches often included a presentation element, where the consulting organisation set out the aims of and parameters for the consultation exercise and the wider consultation process itself. By clearly stating their aims and objectives, organisations necessarily educated respondents about what they were trying to achieve and how and why they were trying to achieve it.
Consultees also felt they had developed an understanding of both what the organisation could and could not do. Involvement in consultation gave participants an understanding of the constraints within which organisations work and the extent to which the action they can take was limited by these constraints.

The same degree of learning about the organisation was not obvious in the case of more quantitative and less participative consultation approaches. For example, participants in a citizens’ panel commented on the very restricted nature of some of the consultation that they were involved in. Even where supporting documentation was provided to give some background information on the issue under consultation, this was not always read or read thoroughly. For example, one organisation had used newspaper and poster advertising and a standard letter of introduction to inform a specific target group about a proposed consultation exercise. However, only a quarter of people in this group reported that they knew at the outset how the information they were providing as part of the subsequent consultation was going to be used.
In addition, consultees often regarded this information as evidence that the organisation had already considered its options and may well already have a preferred outcome or taken a key decision. Paper based consultation, such as questionnaire surveys, seemed more likely to be charged with tokenism by participants in the process.

Enhancing Participation

When consultees were asked about their willingness to participate in further consultation there was overwhelming interest and agreement to be involved in future events. As a proxy measure of enhanced engagement and participation this seems to suggest that consultation was highly effective in impacting on this at the level of the individual.

Figure 5.2 Consultees agreement with statement
‘I would be willing to take part in more consultation exercises’

(Base=87)
86% of respondents expressed a willingness to take part in future consultation exercises, and this was fairly universal across the different types of consultation approaches used. Oddly however, positivity about the consultation process had not directly translated into an increased willingness to offer views generally – just under two thirds of consultees felt they were more likely to offer their views in future, but almost a quarter though this unlikely.

The difference in attitude towards providing individual views amongst consultees may, again, reflect the type of consultation exercise in which the person was involved. Those who gained most in terms of building confidence and a feeling that their views were valued, were those involved in the more participative approaches. For example, as commented by one consultee at a civic commission:

“I played a much larger part than I had thought. There was a lot of information given to us and we split into groups to discuss it and then reported back. I didn’t think there would be so much input by ordinary members of the public.”

Consultee at civic commission

It was true also that this positivity amongst individuals derived from seeing how their inputs have been put to use and the impact of these upon the policy or practice of the organisation.

Feedback

Just over two fifths of consultees knew whether any action was planned, or had been taken, as a result of the consultation, although in some cases organisations were still deliberating over what action to take as a result of the consultation. Feedback to consultees was clearly essential to their understanding of their role in the consultation process and the value placed on their involvement.

“It’s a really good idea getting people involved like this. I hope that they carry on as it is a good idea, but they must keep up the impetus and get back to people so they can see the results.”

Citizen Panel member

The extent to which consultees were aware of the impact of consultation varied both by type of consulting organisation and the nature of the consultation exercise. A number of consultees involved in longer term qualitative consultation techniques had developed a good understanding of the process in which they were involved and how the outputs generated by the consultation would be used. Some had even been involved in presenting their findings to committees and council, although this had not always been a rewarding experience.

“I would like to know what the Councillors felt about it. I made the presentation to the Council for 20 minutes and did not get any feedback from them.

Was it just an exercise for management? The Councillors do not seem to have been involved.”

Consultee at community conference
Furthermore, amongst those taking part in citizens’ juries, civic commissions or Planning for Real exercises, respondents were often able to identify the specific issue that they had raised within the final output, whether it was a dangerous pothole in the road or the need for new texts books at their children’s school.

Other consultees, specifically those involved in more quantitative based approaches, appeared less likely to have been provided with feedback and were less likely to appreciate their role or the value of their inputs. The perception of these individuals was that they were merely providing information, and this contrasts with the views of those involved in more participative consultation exercises, who were involved in making recommendations and drafting the final reports for example.

In that the feedback on more quantitative studies was largely impersonal (in the form of ‘x%’ thought this) and less detailed, consultees tended to identify less with the final outputs (recommendations, opinions etc.) from the consultation.

Whilst feedback on the outputs of the consultation process was seen as important to consultees, this in itself was not regarded as the end point of the consultation. Consultees were very keen to know the ‘results’ of the consultation and were not content with merely hearing that their views had been reported to other interested parties. They tended to define effectiveness in the narrowest sense, and wished to see how their specific inputs had been used or recommendations adopted as soon as possible after the consultation, if they were to regard the consultation as effective from their perspective.

**Genuine and Open Consultation**

Over 30% of consultees felt that the consultation they had been involved in had been an open one, where the organisation asked for and listened to their views and allowed them to help shape future decisions. Over 40% of consultees thought that in some ways the consultation exercise had not been fully open and that certain issues or options had been discounted or could not be considered. These consultees did however feel that, where they could provide input, this may genuinely make a difference to future policy and practice.

A small number felt that the consultation they had been involved with felt like a ‘pointless exercise’. This view tended to be expressed in relation to more structured approaches where consultees felt that they had not had an opportunity to express their views adequately. In a few instances this dissatisfaction with the consultation process arose from unrealistic expectations for the consultation on the part of those involved. Clearer communication of the aims of the exercise and the wider consultation process itself may have helped to prevent this problem arising.

The survey of consultees undertaken for this research revealed key insights into the experience of those participating in the consultation process, their perceptions of what makes for genuine and effective consultation and the benefits arising from their involvement. This study, however, found little attempt on the part of organisations to involve consultees, or introduce the perspective of consultees, into their evaluation systems. Any formal evaluative work with consultees tended to focus on details of process and technique rather than on higher level issues of effectiveness and achievement of outcomes.
5.4 HOW TO EVALUATE?

There was widespread support for the process of evaluation as a means of assessing the effectiveness of consultation amongst the organisations involved in this study, and there was some evidence that evaluation of the process of innovative approaches to consultation was taking place. In particular, when innovative techniques were being tested, commissioners had actively sought instant feedback from consultees on their experience of the exercise, although even this was often obtained through informal channels i.e. word of mouth. Consultation approaches that involved consultees and the commissioning organisations working closely together also facilitated the feedback and evaluation processes, with consultees able to offer their views on the event.

Evaluating the outcomes of consultation proved much more of a problem for consulting organisations. As specific consultation outputs often fed into wider, more long and complex decision making processes there was often considerable time lag and between the generation of consultation outputs and their implementation or their contribution to measurable outcomes. Nor was measuring these outcomes an easy task for the organisations for reasons discussed earlier in this chapter. As such, it was perhaps not surprising that there was little evidence of formal or systematic outcome evaluation taking place amongst organisations, and most of these organisations considered the consultation they had undertaken to be effective from an entirely subjective point of view. A more structured and objective approach to evaluation could help organisations to learn the lessons of consultation and assess its real impact on their policy and practice.

KEY QUESTIONS

The introduction of evaluation measures as part of a consultation exercise need not be resource intensive, and standard approaches could be developed for use over a number of types of consultation events. The key challenge may perhaps be to develop a culture of evaluation within an organisation and to ensure adequate resources are allocated to evaluation at appropriate stages in the consultation process.

Q: Were the aims and objectives of the consultation achieved?

The purpose of an evaluation is to identify if and how the stated aims and objectives of the consultation were achieved. Both short and longer-term objectives need to be assessed, and if any objectives were not achieved its should be asked why and what would be done to prevent this in the future? Did the consultation help inform decision making, budget or priority setting, service design and delivery, performance monitoring, target setting?

Q: Was the consultation exercise itself effective?

This could cover a range of issues such as recruitment, timing, choice and location of venue, attendance or response rates etc. A number of organisations administered an evaluation questionnaire on completion of a consultation exercise. Such a questionnaire should cover aspects such as comfort and convenience of venue, timing of event, clarity of objectives and whether these were met, content and format of information and support materials provided. Consultees’ impressions of what worked well, ease of participation, and suggestions for improvement, would also be instructive.
Q: Was a representative sample or specified target group reached?

Q: Were all consultees given equal opportunity to participate?

Q: What resources were used? (planned and unplanned)

What were the final direct and indirect resource requirements and costs of the consultation including all staff time and funding? Were these the predicted resource requirements and costs and if not why?

Q: Was the consultation Value for Money?

How did the cost of the approach compare to that of alternative approaches? Did the consultation have an impact on value for money elsewhere in the organisation? Was/could the costs have been shared with a partner organisation?

Q: What Feedback was Given About the Consultation?

This should cover feedback to all those involved in the consultation, including organisation staff and consultees. Was this disseminated to the wider community if appropriate?

Q: What were the direct and indirect impacts of the consultation?

For consulting organisations and consultees - has there been greater mutual listening, learning and understanding, better partnership working for example? What were the wider community benefits? Possible proxy measures for this could include:

- higher voting rates at elections
- increased registration rates to vote at elections
- greater and wider participation in consultation and other community events
- higher volunteer rates to become involved in community activities
- greater numbers or likelihood of standing for local office
- greater numbers or likelihood of people becoming active within the management groups of various community or neighbourhood groups

EXEMPLARY QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTEES

Q: What did they know about why the consultation was being held, who was being consulted, their individual role as consultees and how their input would be used?

Q: Why did consultees get involved in the consultation?

Q: What did consultees expect from the exercise?

Q: What are consultees’ views on the consultation exercise - in terms of information and support materials provided, approach used, venue, timing etc.?

Q: What did consultees think they got from the exercise?

Q: What are consultees views on the consultation feedback provided?

Q: What do consultees see as the outcomes of the consultation?

Q: How do they feel about the consulting organisation and has this changed?
CHAPTER SIX GUIDANCE ON CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

This section of the report provides detail on a variety of the techniques that were being used to consult with people amongst the organisations interviewed as part of this study. This is not a comprehensive examination of all the possible approaches. Rather the researchers have concentrated on providing as much information as possible about approaches that are being widely used at present or which are likely to be used in the near future. The rationale for this is that this information will be of most relevance to the bulk of the organisations likely to be reading this report.

A list of the techniques covered in detail in this chapter is provided below, whilst more limited information on a range of additional techniques that were not used widely within Scotland is contained at the end of this chapter.

GUIDANCE ON APPROACHES

| 6.1  | BRAINSTORMING          |
| 6.2  | CITIZENS’ JURIES AND CIVIC COMMISSIONS |
| 6.3  | CITIZENS’ PANELS, DISTRICT CIRCLES AND USERS PANELS |
| 6.4  | COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS CARDS |
| 6.5  | COMMUNITY PROFILING / COMMUNITY APPRAISAL |
| 6.6  | DELIBERATIVE OPINION POLLS AND REFERENDA |
| 6.7  | EXHIBITIONS, CAMPAIGNS AND PRESENTATIONS |
| 6.8  | FOCUS GROUPS AND IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS |
| 6.9  | OPINIONMETER          |
| 6.10 | PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL |
| 6.11 | PLANNING FOR REAL |
| 6.12 | PRIORITY SEARCH AND NOMINAL GROUPS |
| 6.13 | PUBLIC MEETINGS |
| 6.14 | ROUND TABLE WORKSHOPS |
| 6.15 | SURVEYS (QUESTIONNAIRE BASED) |
### OTHER CONSULTATION TECHNIQUES

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The information presented on each approach in this chapter provides guidance on the use of the approach within Scotland, the role of the approach, the extent to which the approach provides coverage of different groups that may otherwise be excluded from the consultation, some key issues to consider when thinking of using the approach, resourcing issues and a pointer for further information about the approach. Examples of use of the approach in practice are written up as case studies attached to each approach. These examples attempt to illustrate use of the approach in an 'innovative' way. In this sense, innovation has been defined quite widely, whether in terms of the trial of an approach that was not previously used by the organisation, the innovative use of stimulus materials or new technology to gather information, or the development and use of new techniques of engaging with consultees. Within these case study examples there are frequent references to other approaches that had a bearing on the overall consultation. This is indicative of the extent to which there may be several approaches available to address a particular issue and suggests that consultation strategies and exercises need to be flexible and develop over time.

The extent to which different approaches can work together to support each other and enhance the effectiveness of an exercise is one of the reasons why this report does not attempt to develop a categorisation or classification scheme for the approaches (along such lines as standard qualitative and quantitative approaches or in terms of the perceived extent to which an approach is participatory rather than informative). Rather, organisations should consider ways of developing approaches and employing them in an innovative way to meet their particular requirements. With adequate thought, planning and resources, it is possible to build a strong participative element into most approaches to consultation and to develop more traditional techniques to involve and engage consultees to a greater extent.
6.1 BRAINSTORMING

**Overview**

Brainstorming is a commonly used technique designed to promote original and creative thinking. Its purpose is to generate a number of ideas from a group of people – ranging from two to a large number of participants - within a short period of time.

A particular topic is raised for discussion, and participants are asked to call out any thoughts or ideas that the topic may bring to mind. As ideas are generated, they are recorded for all participants to see in order to stimulate further thoughts. These additional thoughts are then added to the list until such time as no further thoughts are forthcoming from participants.

**Role**

The approach is often used as part of, or in conjunction with, other exercises as the ideas will need refinement, discussion or prioritisation. As such, this is very much a starting point for an exercise rather than a complete approach.

**Targeting**

Brainstorming sessions are reasonably easy to set up and conduct and can be used with groups of various sizes. As participants are not required to stand up and speak in public and are thus not the focus of attention, this is an effective method of encouraging contribution from a large number of people. However, as is the case with other consultation techniques, there is a risk that certain groups such as non English-language speakers or those with literacy or hearing difficulties might be excluded.

**Issues to Consider**

The following factors should be taken into account when managing a brainstorming session:

- All ideas presented are of equal importance and validity
- Thoughts can be as unstructured and wide-ranging as necessary, although linkages between ideas should be encouraged
- Quantity, rather than quality, of ideas is the prime consideration
- Ideas should not be discussed or rejected
- Facilitators should be aware of common trends and potential solutions.

**Resources**

The technique does not require great input in terms of time or expense.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

The approach is widely used in all facets of life and types of organisation. For example, it is intrinsic to many of the consultation exercises conducted by South Lanarkshire Council and is identified in their guide as a useful initial stage.
6.2 CITIZENS’ JURIES AND CIVIC COMMISSIONS

Overview

Citizens’ juries were developed over the last 20 years in both Germany and the USA, and are now being used in the UK. They usually contain between 10 and 25 participants who have been selected to generate a representative cross-section of the wider population in terms of gender, ethnic mix, age and other factors. As such, they represent the general public rather than particular sectors or interest groups.

Civic commissions are similar to citizens’ juries. However, the difference between them relates to the way in which the output and recommendations are achieved, with the commission asked to examine the evidence and make recommendations. This issue was alluded to in a recent paper for the Market Research Society\(^\text{41}\) which discussed the pressure on ‘juries’ to reach either a unanimous verdict or consensus view. Commissions are regarded by some as a way of avoiding the perceived pressure towards uniformity and allow a wider range of issues to be considered and commented upon in the output.

Role

Juries meet to deliberate upon specific issues and have the opportunity to cross-examine witnesses, while facilitation is carried out by a trained moderator. The entire process generally takes between three and five days. Despite the above comments, there is no requirement for unanimity amongst the jurors and their conclusions may take the form of guidelines rather than recommendations. A range of different subjects has been covered in juries conducted in Scotland to date.

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- It can be used to develop, guide or implement policy proposals and to resolve complex issues which have no immediate or straightforward solution
- Jurors/individuals can spend a period of several days in consideration of one particular project, thus providing a well-reasoned and viable solution
- People are given the opportunity to play an active role in decision-making and to participate more fully in the citizenship process.

A recent review of juries\(^\text{42}\) concluded that the jury approach was effective where:

- The output is suggestion/recommendation based, not an understanding of behaviour or views.
- Quantitative data on the strength of views is not sought
- There is full transparency of the process
- Recommendations will have an influence
- More than one jury is run. Given the resources required to establish a jury, this could be a significant limiting factor.

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\(^{41}\) Market Research Society. Extract from Research 2000 Report *New Types of Panel in Government Research*

\(^{42}\) Market Research Society. Extract from Research 2000 Report *New Types of Panel in Government Research*
Overall Role within Process

Citizens’ juries and commissions tend to be stand-alone exercises although the information obtained and resulting recommendations will often input into thinking for a number of years.

Targeting

The process encourages a culture of citizenship and allows a complex issue to be explored in-depth by the people who are affected by it. As detailed above, it can cover topics as diverse as employment opportunities, transport choice, vandalism and services for the elderly, and is most appropriate when the Council is undecided about an issue.

However, there is a risk that the selection process might not deliver a representative sample, either because reliable results may not be obtained from a limited number of participants, or because of the unrepresentative nature of a self-selecting sample. In addition, citizens with below average literacy skills or non-English speakers could be excluded by this type of consultation exercise.

Issues to Consider

The following issues should be taken into account:

- Citizens’ juries and commissions seek to be representative of the general public and allow deliberation of complex issues and unbiased decision making. There is doubt\(^\text{43}\), however, about whether a small group of jurors can be truly representative of all views
- Information for the jury/commission should be presented in a clear and concise manner
- The moderator should not direct or manipulate those taking part; the role of the moderator is facilitation not interpretation
- The jury’s/commission’s findings must be made clear in the final report
- The decisions or recommendations of the jury/commission are not binding on the organisation although there will be an agreement that the organisation will take full account of the recommendations
- Juries and commissions are expensive and time-consuming
- A high level of knowledge about the subject under discussion is required
- The output is qualitative
- A training or briefing element is necessary, to inform jurors how the process will work
- Time must be built in at the end of the exercise to allow jurors to approve the report.

Resources

Citizens’ Juries can be an expensive method of consultation, costing between £5,000 and £25,000 to run. In addition, jurors are normally paid to participate, covering their loss of earnings, carer costs and transport costs. Special provision such as crèche facilities may facilitate participation by lone parents, while special arrangements may need to be made to compensate those jurors who are in receipt of benefits in order to ensure that they do not suffer any adverse financial effects. Estimated costs of a citizens’ commission were higher that those of a jury.

\(^{43}\) Market Research Society. Extract from Research 2000 Report *New Types of Panel in Government Research*
Juries/commissions are usually recruited and facilitated by external consultants who work with them to prepare their recommendations and to ensure that the organisation is not seen to be manipulating the outcome. The jury/commission also hears presentations from a range of experts or those with a particular interest in the subject matter.

The planning and implementation of a citizens’ jury or commission can be a time-consuming process, both in terms of internal and external input. In exceptional cases, several months’ preparation may be required to recruit the representative sample and obtain the services of the expert witnesses and moderator, while the exercise itself is conducted over a period of three to five days (sometimes split over two weeks).

**Potential Pitfalls**

Concern has been expressed about the ability of one jury to provide the full picture. In addition, they can involve substantial direct and indirect costs such as the provision of pre-jury background material and staff time and in terms of opportunity cost this may appear to be poor value for money.

It should also be noted that juries and commissions are not considered to be an effective method of consultation when dealing with emotive subjects or in cases where views have become entrenched over time.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

Of the 126 organisations targeted in the research, a total of ten (8%) confirmed that they had used a citizens’ Jury within the last two years. Specific information on the use of civic commissions was not obtained, due to the similarity between the commission and jury processes.

The jury approach was used most widely in local authorities and Health Boards (16% and 13% of those interviewed respectively).

As part of the Good Neighbourhood Initiative, South Lanarkshire Council carried out Scotland’s first citizens’ jury – “Focus on Hillhouse” – in March 1997 to debate, and formulate solutions to, the problems of vandalism and graffiti in the Hillhouse area of Hamilton. Subsequently, the Council conducted two further juries – “Services for the Elderly in Rural Areas” and “Access to Leisure/Entertainment for Young People in East Kilbride” – in November 1997 and April 1998 respectively.

In March 1997, Fife Council also held a citizens’ jury to address the following topic – “What can public agencies and local communities do to create employment opportunities in Levenmouth?” This resulted in 50 recommendations. In addition, the Scottish Executive has funded two pilot citizens’ juries in SIP areas (East Ayrshire and Great Northern), while a number of other SIPs in Scotland are implementing jury exercises.

Clackmannanshire Council held a civic commission to look at transport choice.

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### Future Use/Approach

Of the 126 organisations interviewed, 20 stated that they would consider using citizens’ juries for the first time in the future. Those that expressed most interest in using citizens’ juries were SIPs, Health Boards and local authorities.

Few significant changes to the format of the juries were cited. The main change that had been implemented was in a phasing of the jury, splitting it over a two-week period and giving Jurors more time to deliberate.

In addition, early experience indicates the need to have witnesses drawn from senior positions within an organisation so that jurors can debate with them the feasibility of certain courses of action. Jurors also need to have some say in the mix of witnesses they see. Phasing of the jury allows this flexibility.

Recommendations should be acted upon quickly and the consultation should not be undermined by other action that is ongoing and which relates to the subject under discussion.

### Further Details


Further information on citizens’ juries is available in *Consultation Guidelines* published by Fife Council, *A Guide to Consultation* published by South Lanarkshire Council and on the website [www.pip.org.uk](http://www.pip.org.uk)
CITIZENS’ JURY CASE STUDY: South Lanarkshire Council

Project Overview

Three juries (Focus on Hillhouse; Services for Older People in Rural areas; Access to Leisure and Entertainment for Young People in East Kilbride). Each jury addressed a specific issue identified as a priority for South Lanarkshire in the Council’s household survey of 1600 residents.

Stages in the Consultation

- Recruitment through leaflets, advertising and door-to-door recruitment in various combinations
- Jury representative of target population
- Introductory evening meeting followed by the jury meeting over three or four consecutive days
- Each jury produced 30 or more recommendations for the Council and, for example, the Police, the Health Service, transport providers and the voluntary sector.

Time and Financial Resources

Total external costs of around £15,000 - £16,000 for each jury (around £9,000 to cover consultants’ costs for recruitment, facilitating and reporting; around £3,000-£4,000 for juror payments; around £1,500 for venue and catering and a further £1,300 in print and PR) plus around 100 days of staff time.

Other Resources Required

Expert witnesses.

Outputs and Outcomes

Contributed to the development of policy and an action plan for each issue.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

Provision of considered and informed views on relatively complex subjects.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

No obvious need for changes identified although care needs to be taken in evaluating and/or selecting external consultants with appropriate skills.

Early experience suggests that jury days should be spread over a longer period of time, for example, running a 4-day jury over a 2-3 week rather than 1-week period.
### CIVIC COMMISSION CASE STUDY: Clackmannanshire Council

#### Project Overview

Undertaken with the aim of informing the Council’s plans to improve transport choices, taking account of different transport users, pedestrians, community safety etc.

#### Stages in the Consultation

- Initial desk research and shadowing of other juries to identify procedures (the Council did not make use of any external advisers or consultants)
- Development of a population profile from Census data, taking account of age, sex, marital status, employment status, ethnic origin and dependent children
- Mailing to a random sample supplemented by advertising, leaflets and posters inviting declarations of interest
- Mailing of questionnaires to those expressing interest
- Scrutiny of the returned questionnaires with a view to selecting a number of appropriate participants
- Selection of 16 participants, from a pool of 50-60 volunteers, to be as closely representative of the population profile as possible
- Four-day meeting of the commission and production of recommendations which are feeding into policy.

#### Time and Financial Resources

Extensive staff time and a total cost, taking account of all internal resources, of around £20,000. All costs were internalised and some sponsorship was obtained to help allay the cost of materials etc. Most of the cost element arises from the estimated Council staff time. Thought to represent good value for money given that costs were internal.

#### Other Resources Required

Expert witnesses.

#### Outputs and Outcomes

Findings have fed extensively into policy although government restrictions limited the routes open.

#### Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

Considered to have been extremely effective in this instance but its uses are thought to be limited because of time and resource issues.

#### Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

Think about timing in relation to elections.
6.3 CITIZENS’ PANELS, USERS’ PANELS AND DISTRICT CIRCLES

Overview

A citizens’ panel is a group of people who have agreed to be consulted periodically for their views. It is intended that the panel should be as representative of the population as possible, although this cannot be guaranteed.

The number of people on the panel can vary from 750 to 2,000. A larger number allows sub-groups such as young people, the elderly or those living in a specific geographical location to be identified. The membership of the panel is changed regularly and systematically – i.e. one third replaced each year - to allow people to “drop out” and to enhance its representativeness.

Once recruited, an organisation can use the panel for large-scale surveys. Alternatively, individuals can be selected to participate in smaller group discussions, focus groups or other consultation exercises.

Users’ panels are similar to citizens’ panels with the exception of the fact that they focus on individuals with certain characteristics rather than the whole population. For example, a users’ panel may be comprised of tenants, those who visit a certain hospital or a leisure centre, or those using the occupational therapy service.

Wycombe District Council has introduced a District Circle approach, based along the line of the citizens’ panel. It represents a smaller type of panel consisting of a few hundred respondents and reflects the age/gender structure revealed by the census. It is demand-activated, operates as a district-wide customer panel using postal questionnaires and takes place two or three times per year. District Circles can be rapidly established and easily maintained, even with limited resources.

Role

Panels can be used in a wide range of ways - for surveys, as a source of delegates at conferences or workshops or for other forms of participatory and qualitative work. However, there is a risk that, because of this very flexibility, they may be over-used to the point where participants suffer from “respondent fatigue”. The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Panels allow co-ordination within and between agencies, enhancing partnership working
- As panel members are recruited on a voluntary basis, they are more likely to be committed to responding to questionnaires, thus producing more reliable results than non-panel postal surveys.
- Panels usually involve contact with a large number of people and offer the opportunity to consult members of the population who have traditionally been hard to consult - such as members of ethnic minority groups – by conducting door-to-door recruitment
- Panels can allow changes in the composition of an area to be tracked by obtaining regular and updated information about the resident population
- Panels allow individuals to develop a relatively high degree of collective knowledge of an organisation’s responsibilities and services
- Once established panels are a quick and inexpensive method of gathering information
- Providing that adequate feedback is given, participants generally feel valued.
**Overall Role within Process**

Panel consultation can be stand-alone exercises or used jointly with other techniques.

**Targeting**

A key aspect in the establishment of the panel is ensuring that it is as representative as possible. Panels established in Scotland generally have adequate representation of ethnic minority and disabled people, but this must be ensured by careful targeting at the outset. There is a risk however that certain groups, such as those with limited spoken English, could be excluded.

The larger the number of people on the panel, the greater the potential for sub-groups to be identified e.g. young people, older people, those in different geographical locations. Some methods of recruitment involve self-selection but it is possible to ensure that the panel is not entirely self-selecting.

The membership of the panel may be changed regularly to allow for people leaving and to ensure that it remains representative.

**Issues to Consider**

In establishing a citizens’ panel, the following issues should be taken into account:

- The panel is a means of developing an understanding amongst a group of people with a sense of involvement in an organisation’s activities, and of acting as a sounding board for issues and proposed developments
- It has a very flexible format which can be adapted for use in a variety of areas, or issues
- Panel recruitment reaches a large number of people either through postal distribution or door-to-door contact
- Experience has shown that, once recruited, panels can elicit high response rates and expressions of interest from the community
- Scientific and robust methods of recruitment, questionnaire design and analysis must be used to recruit and survey panel members, both to ensure that the members are representative of the population as a whole and to ensure that minimal bias is achieved
- Panels allow surveys or other research to be undertaken at short notice
- Considerable staff support is required to establish and maintain the panel
- As panel members become increasingly experienced and knowledgeable, they may also become less representative of the population as a whole, thus necessitating regular replacement of the membership
- The panel reflects the agenda of the organisation, rather than that of the community
- Specific skills are required to analyse the data
- A considerable degree of commitment is required from participants who may be asked to contribute to regular questionnaire or telephone surveys for example, or to attend various events
Resources

The set-up and recruitment costs are likely to be expensive, requiring significant resources in terms of staff time, skills and money. However, sharing costs (both set-up and maintenance) with other partners can be cost-effective and should ultimately prove to be cheaper than conducting regular, one-off surveys. Panels allow regular, large-scale surveys to be carried out at a lower cost than if done separately and response rates tend to be very high. For example, a postal survey of panel members might be expected to achieve a response rate of 60-75%, compared with response rates of c20-25% for non-panel audiences.

Recruitment of potential participants can be undertaken by postal distribution, followed by a door-to-door “top-up” exercise to target those participants who might otherwise be excluded (i.e. those with a disability, the young or those from ethnic minority groups). Recruitment costs will vary according to the method of recruitment used. As guidance, one of the cheaper options is to recruit using a self-completion approach, but with some personal targeting of more difficult groups. A panel of 1,000 recruited by this means would cost £10,000-£18,000.

The annual revenue cost of the South Lanarkshire Citizens’ Panel is estimated at £20,000. This sum provides for the maintenance of the panel database, rotation of panel members, stationery, feedback and the annual Quality of Life survey of the full panel.

As mentioned above, a high level of staff support is required both to establish and maintain the panel, and to analyse the data.

A number of panels in Scotland are jointly managed. The advantages in jointly managing a panel with other key service providers are as follows:

- The ability to share resources and avoid duplication of effort
- Improved communication and information-exchange
- The promotion of joint objective-setting and performance monitoring
- Access to a valuable tool for community planning.

Providing feedback on survey results or the outcome of consultation can minimise the dropout rate of panel members. However, regular and systematic renewal of panel members is required to ensure that they are still representative of the population.

Potential Pitfalls

There is a risk that organisations can become over reliant on their panels. This is one of the problems faced by Scottish local authorities, as individual service departments become increasingly aware of the potential value of this resource. However, the panel may not contain sub groups of interest to make it an effective consultation channel for such purposes, and it may be more appropriate to develop user panels or user surveys for example.

Strategies need to be put in place, particularly in the case of shared panels, to ensure that participants are representative of all groups in the community and that self-selection and attrition do not bias the sample.

Much of the literature on citizens’ panels highlights the potential problems of panel staleness and wear-out, discussing the need to refresh panels as well as replace panel leavers or non-
participants. Over an 18-month period response rates declined from 70+% to 50-55% for two panels in Scotland. These panels are now being refreshed and consideration being given by one panel manager as to how to better incentivise panel members. As part of their panel maintenance, local authorities in Scotland actively ask panel members to opt to continue their panel membership on each occasion they approach them for information. This is seen as more cost effective than trying to contact those who have decided not to participate.

Panels are not ideally suited to the collection of tracking data and monitoring of change in performance standards as panel members may become more aware and informed of services or issues and may provide atypical results. There is a belief that panels do not need to be refreshed if care is taken about the range and mix of issues on which they are consulted. It is argued that as long as panel members are not continually consulted on the same issue, and if no attempt is made to used panels to measure change over time such as in service delivery standards, then a panel could be run for years before being ‘retired’ and entirely replaced.

Examples of Use in Scotland

29 (23%) of the 126 organisations in this study had used a citizens’ panel within the last two years. The approach was most widely used in local authorities (41%) and LECs (31%).

George Street Research is currently involved in the design of People’s Panels for Scottish area-based SIPs. 24 SIPs confirmed their intention to establish a panel in their area and the establishment of these should be completed in those locations by end July 2000.

Following discussions with local public service providers in spring 1998, South Lanarkshire Council established the first Scottish citizens’ panel of 1,600 members in conjunction with Greater Glasgow Health Board, Lanarkshire Health Board, Scottish Homes and Lanarkshire Development Agency. City of Edinburgh Council established the second panel in Scotland. As well as having a citywide panel of 2,000 individuals, there are two booster panels, one in the West Edinburgh Community Planning Area and one in the South Edinburgh SIP. Numerous other panels now exist in Scotland.

Argyll and Clyde Health Board and Dumfries and Galloway Health Council have undertaken consultation with user panels.

Future Use/Approach

Of the 126 organisations interviewed, 29 stated that they would consider using citizens’ panels for the first time in the future. Those which expressed most interest in using citizens’ panels were SIPs, Health Boards and local authorities (35%, 33% and 31% of these organisations respectively).

Further Details

The South Lanarkshire Citizens’ Panel was established in June 1998. Brenda Calder, Corporate Policy Officer, South Lanarkshire Council, is the day-to-day panel manager (tel: 01698 454444).

Further information on citizens’ panels is available in Citizens’ Panels – a new approach to community consultation published by LGIU.
CITIZENS’ PANEL CASE STUDY: South Lanarkshire Council (Local Authority) in partnership with Greater Glasgow Health Board, Lanarkshire Development Agency, Lanarkshire Health Board and Scottish Homes

Project Overview

The panel was established as a flexible and cost-effective method of consulting with the public, after discussion between local public service providers and agreement to joint funding and management through a Steering Group.

Stages in the Consultation

- Recruitment of 1,600 panel members, using an external consultancy, through postal invitation and face-to-face follow up (based on four geographical mini-panels of 400 that were representative in terms of gender, age and socio-economic grouping)
- Initial survey on Quality of Life (70% response)
- Community Planning Survey (67% response)
- Continued use for recruitment of focus groups and questionnaire based surveys (response rate down to 56% after 16 months).
- Different reporting mechanisms are used depending upon the nature of the exercise. Feedback is provided by means of a newsletter for panel members.
- A replenishment exercise has just been completed for the first time, involving the identification of new sample and a subsequent recruitment drive to them.

Time and Financial Resources

On going panel maintenance cost of £20,000 per annum to cover one large scale survey, incidentals and refreshing the panel.

Outputs and Outcomes

It has provided information through surveys and other approaches on council budgets, community planning and health matters, for example.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

Considered very cost effective, flexible and a key way of improving public accountability.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

Consideration would be given to faster replenishment of the panel and incentivising panel members.
6.4 COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS CARDS

**Overview**

Customer comments cards / complaints cards are a simple concept by which cards are displayed in an accessible place for members of the public or users of a service to record any comments they have to make about the service. This is a cheap and effective way of monitoring service provision; it can highlight recurring problems and also provide feedback.

The approach can be extended to allow comments or complaints to be registered by other means – by telephone or through IT-based systems.

**Role**

- This is a very cheap way of monitoring users’ views of a particular service
- Due to the anonymous nature of the approach, users are more likely to be honest in their comments
- The approach attaches equal significance to both small and large issues that are raised by users as no attempt is made to gather information on numbers affected or strength of feeling.
- The cards provide a channel to collect accurate and current perceptions of the service delivered as their use is tied to consumption of the service.

**Targeting**

The respondents are generally self-selecting and there is no opportunity for targeting specific groups. Certain groups will be excluded due to time pressure and access issues.

Cards may also only attract comments from those at the extreme ends of the spectrum - the very satisfied or very dissatisfied. However, the cards are more likely to be completed if they are attractive and eye-catching.

**Issues to Consider**

- The wording on the comments cards / complaints cards should be carefully considered as any ambiguity could be very misleading
- Quite a low level of response should be expected as the target population relates solely to the number of service users who are motivated to take part.

**Resources**

As the resources are often already in place within the organisation, the use of comments cards / complaints cards can be a very cost-effective method of consultation.

**Potential Pitfalls**

People are more likely to complain about a bad experience than applaud a good one. This may result in the pattern of responses being skewed.
Examples of Use in Scotland

Customer comments cards / complaints cards are widely used by organisations in Scotland. All of the LECs and Housing Associations included in the survey, together with the vast majority of local authorities (97%), made use of this approach. The following case studies provide examples of different situations in which comments / complaints cards were used.

Future Use/Approach

Due to their cost effectiveness, future use is likely to continue to be widespread. If possible, acknowledgement should be made of the views expressed on the cards, and subsequent actions taken, in order to encourage others to use them.

FREEPHONE NUMBER CASE STUDY: Kingdom Housing Association

Project Overview

Used as a joint approach both to collect information on a service requirement and to gain feedback on performance in meeting the requirement.

Stages in the Consultation

- Tenants use the Freephone number to register faults or defects
- Once completed, tenants use the Freephone number to record their views on the repair work undertaken.

Time and Financial Resources

Telephone charges only.

Other Resources Required

None.

Outputs and Outcomes

Provides continuous feedback on performance.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

A user-friendly means of providing a necessary service which is helpful to those on limited means. The feedback mechanism is seen to encourage response.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

None - it is an on going service that will continue to be used.
COMMENTS CARDS CASE STUDY: West Lothian Council Housing Service

**Project Overview**

To measure satisfaction with the repair service.

**Stages in the Consultation**

- On completion of a repair, a card is issued upon which tenants can record comments relating to promptness, efficiency, communication and overall levels of satisfaction
- The cards are completed and posted back free of charge to the Council.

**Time and Financial Resources**

Minimal costs involved.

**Outputs and Outcomes**

Helped to identify problems in service delivery which are now being addressed.

**Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)**

The approach provides immediate and accurate feedback and has helped to identify problems with service delivery, which are now being addressed.

**Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach**

None. An independent telephone survey validated the responses obtained by the postcard method and fully justified the use of the postcard approach.
6.5 COMMUNITY PROFILING / COMMUNITY APPRAISAL

Overview

Use of the Community Profiling or Community Appraisal approaches involves a group of individuals from a community working together. Numbers involved can vary, with up to a few hundred taking part. The group, by establishing priorities, builds an all-encompassing description of an area. The description takes into account factors that will shape the development of the area such as social, environmental and economic issues. This is then used to inform decision-making and explore changes that need to be made in the community.

The process is totally focused on the community i.e. it is a survey of the community, by the community, for the community and produces an action plan or list of recommendations for the future of the community.

The typical stages of a good Community Appraisal are as follows:

- A few enthusiasts seek to establish a sound basis of local support for the appraisal
- A widely drawn steering group is established to decide the “what” and the “how”
- A questionnaire is drafted and a household survey planned
- Individual questionnaires are distributed to every household for later collection
- The responses are coded and analysed
- An appraisal report, recommendations and action plan are drafted
- The recommendations are prioritised and linked to the most appropriate group/agency
- Organisations are persuaded to adopt the recommendations as official policy
- The report is publicised via the press, local magazine or notice boards
- The document is distributed locally and to outside agencies at no, or only a small, cost
- The document is discussed by the community and consensus on priorities/action sought
- Task forces are established to take forward action points within an agreed timescale
- Progress is monitored and reported

Role

- Community Profiling/Appraisal gives community members the opportunity to discuss issues which they feel are important within their area
- Community members are encouraged to contribute towards identifying ways in which the issues could be approached and resolved
- All parts of the community can be involved and everyone who attends has an equal opportunity of having their views considered for action
- Priority issues are identified through discussion
- Response and participation rates can be high; e.g. 60% return on self-completion questionnaires was recorded in one area and turnout at meetings can be in excess of 100.

Targeting

Not everyone in the community can take part in the community profiling exercise. Care should be taken in assembling the initial steering group to ensure that a good mix of individuals from different backgrounds is obtained. It is vital that those who form the group will have the support of the community whose views they represent. In particular, minority viewpoints should be represented.
**Issues to Consider**

- The group should be structured in a way that gives all participants equal opportunity to contribute.
- As discussion of community issues can provoke much heated debate, a way of reaching a consensus about priorities needs to be found.
- The process can last as long as 2 years.

**Resources**

Community Profiling can benefit from outside expertise to facilitate the process and ensure that priorities emerge. This adds significantly to the cost. Suggested budgets range from £500-£5,000, mainly to cover report costs. A computer analysis package may be required.

**Potential Pitfalls**

The prioritisation approach can often leave members of the group feeling that their points of view are not being heard because others within the group are more assertive or outspoken, and care must be taken to avoid this. This is an interactive process and some of the steps below are continuous. Later steps in the process will need to be considered at an early stage. The ten steps (identified by the School for Advanced Urban Studies) are as follows:

- Step One: Assembling a Group
- Step Two: Initial Prioritising
- Step Three: Initial Planning and Timescale
- Step Four: Mobilising Resources
- Step Five: Gathering Data (survey based)
- Step Six: Analysing Data and Identifying Needs
- Step Seven: Presenting Results
- Step Eight: Taking it Forward - discussion with the community and consensus
- Step Nine: Working with Others
- Step Ten: Monitoring and Evaluation.

Other sources of information add an initial stage of establishing support for the issue within the community at the outset.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

The approach is mainly used in rural areas, but is not widely used in Scotland. We are aware of only one SIP in Scotland that is considering the option in order to identify problems and issues within various sub areas of the SIP. Other exercises appear to have been conducted by smaller interest groups not covered within the remit of this research.

**Further Details**


*The 10 Step Guide*, created by The School for Advanced Urban Studies (SAUS).
COMMUNITY PROFILING CASE STUDY: EAST AYRSHIRE COALFIELD SIP (forthcoming)

Project Overview

To build up a detailed understanding of the issues facing communities in the SIP area.

Stages in the Consultation

This is still at the planning stage and so exact steps and procedures have not been identified. It is anticipated that:

- Various baseline survey work will take place throughout the area initially. This will be analysed to produce broad community dimensions.
- From the baseline data, pilot areas will be identified that are typical of other communities within the area.
- Various approaches will be used to provide more depth information on the issues that are important to these communities and to explore the dynamics of the communities.

Time and Financial Resources

Not known. The intention is to identify and train activists and community representatives to undertake the work.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

Will aid better understanding of individual areas and enhance community capacity building.
Overview

To conduct a deliberative opinion poll, a representative sample of the target population is selected. The chosen respondents then learn more about the topic - through information sessions, asking questions or participating in a meeting or discussion group. At the end of the discussion, a poll of their views is taken.

On occasions, other polls can be carried out during the process - sometimes at the outset - so that the way in which views have altered can be measured.

This method enables participants to develop some knowledge of the issue prior to giving their views. As such, it can be a better reflection of what views will be following the education and debating process that surrounds a variety of general interest issues.

Referenda are similar to deliberative polling techniques in that people are asked to vote either for or against one option or a limited number of options. Referenda are wider in their coverage, often attempting to poll all those likely to be affected by an issue.

A variety of different methods such as postal ballots and personal voting can be used to conduct referenda, while information technology is presenting new possibilities. In addition to electronic systems that allow groups of people to vote for particular options, telephone and Internet voting from home can be used.

Role

The strengths of the approaches are as follows:

- Respondents have time to consider relevant information before stating their views
- A quantitative measure of “informed” views is provided
- The public’s likely response to a proposed campaign can be tested.

Deliberative opinion polls have been used widely in the USA, principally for political campaigns.

Overall Role Within Process

Deliberative polls were generally seen as part of a continuous or wider process.

Targeting

Although all sectors of the population can be included in deliberative opinion polls, care must be taken to identify respondents within the target group. As with other techniques, there is a risk that non-English speakers could be excluded.
Issues to Consider

The following issues should be taken into account:

- Deliberative polling and referenda are only suitable for certain types of issue on which people can effectively be asked to vote after being given some preliminary information.
- A pilot study is recommended.
- The issues discussed should be of significant interest to the users.
- A decision has to be made regarding the type and quantity of information which is to be given to respondents and this has to be presented in an appropriate manner.
- Questions must be phrased in a way that allows a clear choice between options.
- The meetings, information sessions and/or discussion groups must be well planned and structured.
- Results can be swayed by the amount and quality of information provided by the supporters of each option.
- The use of IT-based methods of polling or voting may improve participation levels, but these techniques pose issues of confidentiality and misuse.

Resources

Deliberative polling and referenda can be very expensive methods of consultation. Participants usually receive a small fee if taking part in a deliberative opinion poll. The approach differs from the jury approach in that a count of opinion or quantitative response will be taken.

The approach can vary in length depending on the amount of information provided. Participants at deliberative opinion poll events should have the opportunity to debate the issues, hear from supporters of all the different options and make a considered choice. Participants generally number between 100 and 300. The format of the meeting has to be carefully planned, including speakers, equipment, room layout and group leaders.

Referenda require mass publicity and a substantial input of resources.

Potential Pitfalls

The main problems identified by organisations that had conducted deliberative opinion polls were poor attendance and a low response rate. One organisation stated that the information they had obtained was skewed and unrepresentative as insufficient people had voted and an interest group had managed to sway the result. Another claimed that the exercise had been too time-consuming.

As both approaches only produce top line information, they may need support from other approaches in order to demonstrate how certain views have developed.

Examples of Use in Scotland

Of the 126 organisations contacted in the research, 13 had used deliberative polling within the last two years.
The approach was used by a small number of Pathfinders, local authorities, SIPs and LECs. Only one Health Board claimed to have used the approach.

National referenda are fairly rare although they have been carried out at local levels – for example, the former Strathclyde Regional Council carried out a referendum amongst residents in the area on the proposed change in responsibility for the water and sewerage service. Western Isles Council carried out two referenda on the proposed quarry development at Lingerbay, in Harris.

**Future Use/Approach**

Only one of the organisations surveyed stated that they were likely to use deliberative polling techniques in the future for the first time.

Two others planned to open the approach up to other participants and sectors of the community. Another two organisations stated that they would use internal resources in preference to external consultants.

Details about the use of referenda were not collected.

**Further Details**

Information on deliberative polling and referenda can be found in the Cabinet Office publication - *An Introductory Guide – How To Consult Your Users*. This can be found on the website www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/servicefirst/
**DELIBERATIVE OPINION POLL CASE STUDY: West Dunbartonshire Council**

**Project Overview**

To help identify the location for a new sheriff court in the area.

**Stages in the Consultation**

- The views of a wide number of groups were sought including local residents and interest groups such as lawyers, the police and traders
- Information provision was by means of local exhibitions, consultation packs and the press
- Those contacted by these means were asked to fill in ballot slips and state their preference for option A or option B as described in the pack

**Time and Financial Resources**

The local newspaper met some of the cost and the approach was seen as an inexpensive way of obtaining the views of several hundred people.

**Other Resources Required**

Durable exhibition materials and information packs.

**Outputs and Outcomes**

A preferred site was identified.

**Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)**

A clear outcome was delivered i.e. 95% of participants voted for one of the options. It was seen as a simple method of seeking views, aided by the quality of the consultation packs.

**Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach**

The response rate from the general public through newspaper coverage was less than expected. However, the approach would be used again for straightforward issues.
6.7 EXHIBITIONS, CAMPAIGNS AND PRESENTATIONS

**Overview**

In many ways the use of presentations, campaigns and exhibitions is similar to that of public meetings, albeit that the audience may be more targeted. The overall aim of these approaches is to convey information to the general public or to a specified group. An aim may be to notify users of a service that it is about to change, inform the public of an organisation’s plans, or fulfil an educational function. Often these approaches are run over a period of time – this increases audience penetration.

**Role**

- Involves the community affected by raising their awareness and usually giving them the opportunity to contact someone if they wish to discuss the topic further
- Provides wide access to a range of individuals through a variety of means / materials e.g., illustrations or interactive technology.

**Overall Role Within Process**

Campaigns, presentations and exhibitions are often used in conjunction with other work being conducted by an organisation.

**Targeting**

The range of success in terms of reaching target groups who are normally excluded can vary with these approaches. One way to overcome this is to ensure that the promotional campaign is widespread or targeted effectively to the group of interest. There needs to be a clear understanding of the identity of the target group.

**Issues to Consider**

- The materials being used to convey the information must be in plain English (without jargon) and, where appropriate, in translated form
- A creative approach should be adopted
- It can be difficult to measure effectiveness in reaching different groups or in communicating with individuals, especially if there is no feedback or update mechanism in place
- The approach may not reach a large number of people or all target groups
- It can be very expensive to produce materials and run these, both in terms of staff time and in terms of value for money if a low turnout results.

**Resources**

The cost of implementing these approaches – both financially and in terms of time - can vary greatly, depending on the level of ambition of the organisation. In general, internal resources are used. Advice is usually sought from consultants in terms of designing the stimulus material, whether it is leaflets or the items on display at the exhibition.
### Potential Pitfalls

Ineffective promotion may mean that the population is not targeted effectively.

Due to the random nature of those reached by this approach, the information generated cannot be considered as representative of all views.

### Examples of Use in Scotland

All the Health Boards / Agencies interviewed in the survey had used campaigns, presentations or exhibitions, while most LECs and local authorities had also used this method.

### Future Use/Approach

Amongst the organisations interviewed, there was a general feeling that they would use these approaches again. Some suggested that they would be able to internalise more of the work on the next occasion.

### Further Details

See Guidance produced by Dumfries and Galloway Community Care Consultation Group\(^{45}\).

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\(^{45}\) Ann Ferguson, Age Concern Scotland (1998) *Good Practice Guide to Consultation in Dumfries and Galloway*. Published by Dumfries and Galloway Community Care Consultation Working Group
PRESENTATION CASE STUDY: KIRK CARE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

Project Overview

Provision of information to the tenants in the Joppa development regarding changes to the building, community and services.

Stages in the Consultation

- A formal meeting took place at which tenants were given both written and verbal information and the opportunity to speak on an open or individual basis
- The Director and Chairman visited the project in order to hold further discussions with groups of tenants
- Development plans were presented to the tenants
- Tenants will be informed by newsletter of any forthcoming alterations in timescales or nature of development plans.

Time and Financial Resources

A disproportionate amount of staff time was used in order to overcome the negative attitudes of certain of the tenants. Notwithstanding the above, valuable feedback was obtained. The costs of the exercise were built into a development programme and covered by overhead management costs. The total budget was a five-figure sum.

Other Resources Required

The Association worked closely with the Housing Department, Social Work Department and firms of architects.

Outputs and Outcomes

This has led to a greater appreciation of the benefits of consultation as well as achieving specific goals.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

The Association underwent a learning exercise in relation to its communication techniques.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

The Association will work with tenants to resolve problems in a positive way. Tenants will be consulted at an earlier stage.
6.8  FOCUS GROUPS AND IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

**Overview**

Focus groups usually involve 8 to 10 people in each group who discuss a particular topic or a range of issues, in depth. It is normal for more than one group to be convened on an issue and for participants with similar characteristics to be included within the same group. Focus groups are a useful way of targeting specific groups whose views may not normally be heard.

Generally a focus group will last for 1¼ to 1½ hours. However, as it is a very flexible approach, it can be extended to last for a 2-3 hour period, or may have reduced numbers (i.e. a mini group of 3-4 individuals where attendees are likely to be very articulate about the issue under debate). A wide range of stimulus materials can be used. Some semi-quantitative data can be obtained during the recruitment process for larger programmes of groups using this technique, for example, if a number of individuals are recruited to the group, quantitative information can be obtained for all contacts, regardless of their attendance at the group.

The use of projective techniques and appropriate stimulus material facilitates the collection of more sensitive information in a group setting. Further details on this can be found by accessing the reference given below.

Depth interviews are similar to focus groups in the skills required, set up and type of information that can be obtained. As they are usually conducted on a one-to-one basis and allow exploration of a particular topic or feature relevant to the participant, this does restrict the extent to which the views expressed may be challenged and subject to debate. Depth interviews give the interviewer the opportunity to build a relationship with the participant, gain their confidence and as a result gather very detailed or sensitive information. Depth interviews can also be conducted as paired depth interviews (2 people) or triads (3 people).

When an interview is of a sensitive nature or, for example, is being conducted with young people, it is often a good idea to use a pairing approach. In the instance of interviewing a young person, they could bring a friend along – this approach may make them more relaxed and thus improve the quality and content of the interview.

Depth interviews are also useful where it is not possible to group respondents - i.e. busy Chief Executives of companies whose diaries will not dovetail or patients widely dispersed across an area.

**Role**

- Focus groups and depth interviews can provide participants with an opportunity to illuminate ideas and views that are not always accessible through other means of consultation
- By targeted recruitment, they provide the advantage of exploring the views of groups that are traditionally excluded from consultation
- Flexibility - focus groups and depth interviews enable participants to raise and discuss issues other than those identified in the topic guide/by the researcher
- Participants are more likely to get involved and feel their views are valued when they have been **invited** to participate
- Careful recruitment is essential.
**Overall Role within Process**

Focus groups and depth interviews tend to be conducted as an element of research projects and will often take place within wider consultation approaches. Focus groups are often used with workshop sessions or to help develop questionnaires for priority search exercises. In association with more quantitative approaches, focus groups can be used at the end of the information gathering, to obtain more information about points that have been raised by the quantitative research or to inform future quantitative research, most often in terms of questionnaire design. Depth interviews are often used in association with focus groups.

**Targeting**

Focus groups provide a way of speaking to groups that would normally be excluded from other consultation approaches, where control is exerted over the recruitment process.

To ensure that all individuals feel at ease with one another and to reduce any feelings of unease, people from similar backgrounds are often recruited to attend a group together as this enhances the group dynamics and promotes discussion.

For sensitive subjects or when dealing with young people, groups can be recruited using friendship pairs i.e. recruiting one person who meets the requirement and asking them to bring someone else with them who will also fit the group profile.

Depth interviews are useful when interviewing members of traditionally excluded groups, or on a very sensitive subject.

**Issues to Consider**

- If the general tone of a focus group is one of conventionality this can sometimes prevent others from raising points that they feel are salient, but not part of the norm
- Use of a fully trained moderator is essential to ensure that any dominant individuals within the focus group do not influence others, and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to state what they think
- It is often preferable to conduct a number of focus groups on one topic as this ensures that a wide range of views is covered and not those based purely on what may be a particularly opinionated group
- As in-depth interviews usually take around one hour to complete, the fieldwork period can be very time consuming – in terms of conducting the interviews and the subsequent analysis (which involves transcribing the interviews and then analysing the transcripts)
- Related to the time factor - as only a small number of participants can usually be involved, it may not be possible to structure the programme of interviews to reach all those of interest and to hear more than one view from a representative of a certain group.
- There is a need to ensure that those recruited are representative. Some types of respondents may need to be screened out.
- To ensure that a full interpretation can be made, discussions should be recorded in full, where possible. Analysing this type of information is a skilled process involving reference to written, verbal, observed and unarticulated data. Particular skill is required to identify patterns in the data and interpret it.
A topic guide should be used to guide the discussion although participants should be able to raise other issues. Development of a clear interview structure is needed to ensure that the information gathered from the interview is relevant and of interest.

There should also be a generous time allowed to set up the groups, as potential participants may not be available to take part at the required time.

**Resources**

The approximate cost of conducting one focus group would be £1,200 - £1,800 and a small programme of groups would cost c£5,000 – £7,000. This would often involve the following:

- professional fees and associated costs (including recruitment of participants, facilitation of the group, recording of the group, transcribing of the group and the subsequent analysis of the findings)
- room hire (including refreshments for participants)
- administration associated with the set up and conducting of focus groups
- expense payments to participants (£10/£15 is the usual amount)
- full report of the findings.

To ensure that the focus group gathers the maximum amount of information, it is often best to use qualified researchers or consultants who are trained in the use of the approach.

The cost of conducting in-depth interviews can vary greatly depending on the audience, the travel needs and the number of interviews being completed. Broadly, in-depth interviews tend to cost in the region of £300-£500 per interview.

**Potential Pitfalls**

Recruitment for focus groups can be time consuming, as it is sometimes difficult to find a target group that meets the very precise characteristics of the target group. Extra time should be allowed to ensure that appropriate recruitment is conducted. Self-selecting groups should be avoided. Nor is it possible to regard one group as representative of all views. A wider programme of groups is often needed.

As some target groups are difficult to access, numerous recruitment approaches should be considered. Also, as the location of the focus group will have an impact on attendance, it is important to ensure that it is accessible and informal (depending on the target group) and that provision is made to help those with children or access problems to attend, for example.

It can be difficult to identify the correct mix of individuals to take part in depth interviews. Additionally, it can often be difficult to remain interested and to formulate an overview if one person is conducting all of the interviews and/or focus groups on a subject, especially when there is a large number to be completed.
**Examples of Use in Scotland**

Focus groups are a popular consultation technique and the majority of the organisations in the survey claimed to have used them in the last two years. All of the Health Boards/Agencies and Pathfinders had used them, as had a significant proportion of LECs.

Greater Glasgow Health Board ran a programme of focus groups to look at health issues in part of Glasgow. The groups made use of video diary stimulus materials to prompt discussion.

City of Edinburgh Council’s research on the Vision for Edinburgh also made use of focus groups as part of the consultation. Mini groups (with business people) and standard groups with a range of other individuals were conducted, the latter within a workshop format.

The use of depth interviews was also especially widespread amongst LECs and local authorities. Borders Health Board interviewed elderly patients (in depth) who had been in hospital, to assess the way the health service had worked for them and how it could be improved.

**Future Use/Approach**

Most of the organisations included in the survey stated that they would use focus groups and depth interviews again.

**Further Details**

FOCUS GROUP CASE STUDY: Greater Glasgow Health Board and City of Glasgow Council

Project Overview

Undertaken jointly with the Council to help identify issues that might affect the health of the socially excluded.

Stages in the Consultation

- Identification of 13 people representing different groups such as the unemployed, single parents, the elderly etc to video record a day in their life as stimulus material; training was provided in the use of the equipment
- Recruitment of six groups covering parents, young people, females, the elderly etc
- While the diary material was edited for use in the groups, the video material was used to stimulate discussion and in the presentation of the findings to illustrate some of the key points raised.

Time and Financial Resources

Relatively inexpensive. No other details provided.

Other Resources Required

Ability to edit video materials and provide training.

Outputs and Outcomes

Produced wide-ranging materials for a number of groups on the subject.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

The video materials were considered to be a strong presentation and stimulus device. Video records could be used again to monitor progress.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

None - wish to use the method again in a range of applications.
6.9 OPINIONMETER

**Overview**

Opinionmeter is described as an innovative approach to consultation. The Opinionmeter is a free-standing unit that consists of a keypad terminal and screen with the capacity to hold a number of questions in questionnaire format. Members of the public can complete a series of questions by using the keypad to indicate their response. The Opinionmeter is usually located in a convenient place that is relevant to the research and accessible to the target group. It has been used in supermarkets and libraries as well as at particular events.

**Role**

- Opinionmeter is quick and easy to use – the results can be analysed at any time over the fieldwork period. This type of instant feedback can help to detect whether particular questions are being misunderstood or if any interesting issues are emerging. This provides the opportunity to revise questions to improve overall output.
- As the Opinionmeter is easy to move, it can be used in a range of locations with relative ease.

**Overall Role within the Process**

Opinionmeter is usually used in conjunction with other research projects. The outcome of conducting an Opinionmeter survey means that any salient points that have been highlighted could be further developed at a later stage of the research.

**Targeting**

One of the advantages of Opinionmeter is that it can be used in exact locations where the target group may be present - for example, in a library if the views of library users are sought. The unit can also be brought to other locations where socially excluded groups may be more likely to be found.

However, the unit does rely on people volunteering to give their views. Some organisations help ensure that the unit is widely used by having a staff member in attendance to persuade people to take part. This also allows some guidance about the way in which the system will work and ensures that usage problems are resolved.

**Issues to Consider**

- Questions used in conjunction with Opinionmeter are very rigid. Participants can only choose from yes/no or multiple choice responses, which may result in some important issues being overlooked.
- Some members of the public may feel apprehensive about using Opinionmeter and thus the respondents may be self-selecting. To overcome this, it may be useful to have a member of staff on hand to encourage and assist everyone.
- Questions should be short and clear, so that everyone can understand. It must be possible to anticipate and incorporate all potential responses in the options given to respondents.
Resources

Once an Opinionmeter has been purchased, the only subsequent costs relate to the time taken to write and input questions and any staff support that is deemed necessary. One organisation reported spending c£5,500 on two units, software and a printer.

The number of people consulted using Opinionmeter depends on a number of factors; the topic covered in the questions, the location of the Opinionmeter and the length of time that the Opinionmeter is accessible, amongst others.

Potential Pitfalls

- The information which appears on the screen is limited and this can make it difficult to understand and answer
- Samples are self selecting and likely to be more IT literate.

Examples of Use in Scotland

Opinionmeter is an approach that has been used extensively by a number of organisations in Scotland as a means of obtaining public opinion and feedback. Many of the case study local authorities had used this approach.

Future Use / Approach

Opinionmeters are widely used by the organisations that have purchased the unit in order to provide additional insight on an issue. They help provide clarity rather than the full picture, and are best used in conjunction with other approaches. They can have a useful role in evaluating approaches on consultation by allowing those who have participated in an exercise to record their views at the time the consultation is taking place.

The cost effectiveness and flexibility of Opinionmeters ensures their future use.

Further Details

Brenda Calder, Corporate Policy Officer, South Lanarkshire Council (tel: 01698 454444).
Kate Park, Corporate Policy, Fife Council (tel: 01592 413751) and Dawn Corbett, Fife Council (tel: 01592 412900).
### Project Overview

Opinionmeter has been used in a wide variety of situations (usually as one element of a much broader consultation process) to gather brief, structured data with almost instantaneous analysis facilities.

### Stages in the Consultation

- Formulation of questions
- Programming
- Piloting
- Placement of Opinionmeter(s) in selected locations.

### Time and Financial Resources

Cost of purchase is limited (estimated at around £2,000) and, once familiar with the system, implementation takes little time. It can be used for any period of time.

### Other Resources Required

Training on use and, in some instances, a feeling that staff should be on hand to assist users if required.

### Outputs and Outcomes

Provides instant feedback on issues and works well with certain targeted groups.

### Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

This is widely described as a quick and cost-effective means of gathering data, particularly on sensitive topics - such as drug and alcohol use amongst young people - on an anonymous basis (machines can be placed in schools, clubs etc). It can also be easily used in different locations, for example supermarkets, to access users of a specific facility.

### Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

None identified. However, the limitations of the approach in terms of the type of data that can be gathered are recognised.
6.10 PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL

**Overview**

In general, this is a practical technique that places particular emphasis on the people who are usually excluded from decision-making.

Participatory Appraisal emerged as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) in the Southern Hemisphere in the mid-1980’s. It is now spreading rapidly to the industrialised countries and has already accounted for more than fifty events in Scotland alone.

PRA can be described as a group of approaches, methods and behaviours that enable people to express and analyse the realities of their lives and conditions, plan what action to take and monitor and evaluate the results. It emphasises processes that empower local people.

The approach aims to create a cycle of gathering data, reflection and learning which leads on to action. Each group of participants examines their perceptions of the current situation, identifies barriers or gaps and proposes solutions or areas for change. It is a methodology that encourages learning and interaction and frequently employs visual techniques. Further detail is obtainable from quoted sources at the end of this section. As an overall approach it is extremely flexible and can encompass elements of other approaches such as the more visual assessments of a planning for real exercise for example, and the participatory and consensus building of a community appraisal exercise.

In many instances the process will be facilitated by an independent agency working closely with the community and outcomes and actions will be agreed with participants.

Participatory Appraisal can be used both with small groups or whole communities. It does not depend on attendance at meetings and can be utilised wherever people are to be found. In general, sessions are undertaken by groups of peers with people having the freedom to choose their own level of participation.

**Role**

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Flexibility
- A highly visual content which counteracts potential literacy problems and stimulates people’s memory
- The ability to simplify complex issues.
- The capacity to be modified and extended.

**Targeting**

The purpose of Participatory Appraisal is to involve individuals from all sectors of the community, particularly those who are frequently excluded from decision-making.
**Resources**

It is essential that the sessions are moderated by facilitators experienced in Participatory Appraisal, although they may be either independent or from the community concerned.

The costs will depend on the length of the process and the numbers of participants involved.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

Greater Glasgow Health Board used the approach with people from one part of the city to develop an action plan to deal with previously identified health issues. A voluntary organisation used the approach to look at the management of forests in rural Scotland as a means of generating local livelihoods.

**Future Use / Approach**

In general, Participatory Appraisal is seen as a highly effective technique that has evolved rapidly and continues to do so. No outstanding problems were identified.

**Further Details**

Information on Participatory Appraisal can be found on the websites [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk) and [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)
Project Overview

The project aimed to involve local people in the East End in discussion with agency staff, and to develop an action plan to deal with health issues identified previously in other work.

Stages in the Consultation

- Recruitment of the public (including young people and parents) through local contacts, projects and initiatives
- Meetings between local people and agency staff, over a number of weeks, to identify actions required in the short, medium and long term and the resources required
- Use of a wide range of largely visual group techniques, such as maps, flow diagrams, calendars etc
- Feedback of the findings to the wider community to seek endorsement and/or further input
- Fora created or developed to take the required actions forward

Time and Financial Resources

External costs were minimal although the project drew heavily on staff resources and was extremely labour intensive over a six-week period.

Other Resources Required

Training on appropriate techniques via Oxfam.

Outputs and Outcomes

A range of action points were developed and agreed with the community.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

Flexible range of techniques that can be used in a variety of different environments and encourage participation from a variety of groups. Encourages constructive thinking rather than drawing attention to negative issues. Relatively cost-effective and, whilst qualitative in nature, the provision of feedback to the broader community allows some validation.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

None identified.
6.11 PLANNING FOR REAL

Overview

The first stage of Planning for Real involves the construction of a large ‘model’ of a neighbourhood. Both large-scale maps and 3-dimensional models may be used. The approach is used by the local community to demonstrate its needs and show the improvements which require to be made in the environment. These are often shown by having participants write on or attach to the model, their comments – for example, any known problems in the area or improvements needed. As such the community is fully charged with identifying issues.

The second stage involves group meetings with the community to prioritise their suggestions and draw up a profile of community needs. In its entirety, Planning for Real is a complete process of community involvement, which can be applied both to small local projects, and the development of strategic planning.

Role

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- The technique is non-confrontational
- All sectors of the community have a chance to be involved
- Discussion of a large number of topics is permitted
- Flexibility in terms of timings and venues
- Simplicity and ease of understanding.

Targeting

It is possible for all sectors and members of a local community to be included in the process, as detailed below:

- Meetings can be held in appropriate venues – for example, “women only” environments for female members of the Muslim community or young people’s environments such as schools
- Suggestion cards and publicity materials can be presented in a variety of different languages
- The visual display is acceptable to those with poor literacy skills
- The technique is reported as appealing to all ages due to its ease of use.
- Everyone within a neighbourhood can be invited by use of a targeted campaign to all households in the area.

There is no finite number of participants and all sectors of the community can be involved.

Resources

In order to obtain maximum benefit from the exercise, a facilitator experienced in Planning for Real should be involved. ‘Experts’ from the statutory authorities may also be invited to attend Planning for Real events, but solely in an advisory capacity.
The venue should be sufficiently large to allow people access to the model/maps. The size of the model varies according to the size of the area being represented and the scale, but is typically sixteen feet by eight feet.

A budget of between £500 and £15,000 should be allocated to cover the cost of materials and venue and the services of a fully trained facilitator for several months prior to the event, during the exercise and at the follow-up prioritising meetings.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

Planning for Real has been extensively used within the UK. It has also proved successful within Europe and worldwide. Clackmannanshire Council has conducted a Planning for Real exercise in Scotland as have Perth and Kinross. The approach was also used in Kyle and Kyleakin in connection with the Skye Bridge Development.

Planning for Real recently formed the focus of an initiative in Clackmannanshire to provide input to the Development Plan. Large scale models were used with residents being asked to identify local problems by attaching ‘fix it notes’ – with written details of the problems - to the maps in the areas where problems had occurred.

**Further Details**

Information on Planning for Real can be found in *Participation Works!* 46. Further details can be obtained from the website www.neweconomics.org

The Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation runs a regular two-day course on Planning for Real. Organisations wishing to get involved in Planning for Real events should contact the Foundation to discuss the ways in which they can obtain optimum benefit from the approach and obtain permission for use of the trademark.

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PLANNING FOR REAL CASE STUDY: CLACKMANNANSHERE COUNCIL

Project Overview

The aim of this consultation, based on drop-in events and workshops, was to encourage residents to contribute to the preparation of the Council’s Development Plan (a land use plan comprising the Structure Plan and Local Plan) and have a real say in how their local area developed over 15 years. In the longer term, it was intended that this would reduce extreme and potentially adverse reaction at the stage when planning applications were submitted.

Stages in the Consultation:

- Models commissioned for every settlement on a scale of 1:1250, showing contours and main buildings such as schools, factories, etc
- Leaflet drops and advertising to inform residents about the consultation process, dates and locations of Saturday morning Drop-in Events and Evening Workshops
- Consultation packs available prior to the events
- Saturday morning Drop-in Events at a range of central locations to allow members of the public to pop in and, for example, pin their comments, ideas or concerns on the model and put forward questions if they wished
- Evening Workshops in the same locations where the public could discuss the priority issues raised by their community
- Opportunities for the public to send their views direct to the Council, using comments forms if they wished
- Production of a Development Plan taking account of residents’ views.

Time and Financial Resources

The project ran over several weeks to cover each relevant location. External costs were limited primarily to the production of scale models.

Other Resources Required

Council staff willing to give up time, outside working hours, to assist in the consultation process. Scale models are required (a significant storage burden).

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

The use of models of this scale helped ‘lay people’ to understand and interpret plans. There were improved participation levels through use of drop-in meetings where the public had an opportunity to make comments without drawing attention to themselves (minimising embarrassment for those who typically would be less forthcoming).

Outputs and Outcomes

Provided both immediate and long-term input of use in the Councils planning department.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

None identified so far.
6.12 PRIORITY SEARCH AND NOMINAL GROUP TECHNIQUE

**Overview**

Priority Search is a computer-aided survey process that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques. Its aim is to improve the performance and effectiveness of an organisation by giving the people surveyed the power to identify their needs and wants, and state their priorities. These ideas are then arranged into a priority ranking for appropriate action.

There are four main stages in the Priority Search process:

- **Project Planning** – the issue is identified and focus groups established to discuss it.
- **Focus Group** – the groups respond to the main issue being explored and outline all the issues of relevance to a constructive debate and consideration of the issue.
- **Survey** – the ideas generated by the focus group are converted into a questionnaire containing paired statements which are distributed to everyone being consulted.
- **Results** – following rapid analysis of the questionnaires, results are produced showing all the statements in ranked order of priority.

The Nominal Group Technique is similar to the Priority Search Technique:

- **Two specific questions are developed prior to a meeting**.
- **The group is then divided arbitrarily into smaller groups of six to eight people, each with a leader, at which point they are shown the questions**.
- **The participants work individually or in pairs for ten to fifteen minutes to answer the questions and these are presented to all those attending**.
- **Once the results are read out, all group members vote for their top five answers**.
- **An overall summary chart is compiled**.
- **The moderator decides whether the groups are ready to vote for their top five overall preferences or whether further work is required**.
- **The session is closed with a summary and agreement relating to the next stage**.

**Role**

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- A wide variety of issues can be addressed.
- Key priorities emerge.
- One issue can be explored in detail.
- The analysis facility allows instant results to be provided, allowing a conference or large group meeting to discuss the findings immediately and obtain feedback.
- Results can be prepared in a variety of formats including a priority list, bar charts, scatter plots and individual results.
- Significant differences in attitudes between different stakeholder groups can be identified as the software can produce this type of analysis.
- The qualitative–quantitative research process gives tangible results from a focus group.
- Flexibility and speed.
**Targeting**

The approaches should reflect a genuine cross-section of respondents, including the full range of sub-groups within the population. Recruitment can be carried out in a variety of ways – for example, by using a market research company, the electoral register or housing records.

**Issues to Consider**

The following issues should be taken into account:

- Priority Search requires input from external consultants or an initial investment in training and software
- Some respondents at the groups may wish to offload complaints rather than engage in constructive discussion
- The quantitative nature of the results may make solutions appear too simple and straightforward
- Analysis of qualitative information may be superficial
- Care must be taken to ensure that the focus groups which will generate possible answers is representative of the larger population.

**Resources**

Three groups of people are involved in the approaches:

- Management - to commission the survey and act on its findings
- Survey Team – to organise, facilitate and advise
- Target Group – to give the ideas, opinions and priorities.

Priority Search also requires investment in training and software, thus increasing the operational costs. In addition, participants may be offered incentives to cover childcare, travel and attendance costs. The questionnaire can be issued to the group and/or taken out to a wider population (up to a maximum of 450) for completion.

**Examples of Use in Scotland**

The approaches can be used to tackle a wide range of issues in any organisation, at both macro and micro level – for example, customers’ wants and needs, work priorities, use of resources and training needs.

The Priority Search software has been purchased by a number of Councils and organisations throughout Scotland, and is in the process of being tested by others. It has been used by many of the case study organisations including Inverclyde Regeneration Partnership and South Lanarkshire Council.

**Further Details**

Extensive information on how to use Priority Search can be found in *A Guide to Consultation* published by South Lanarkshire Council.
### PRIORITY SEARCH CASE STUDY: INVERCLYDE SOCIAL INCLUSION PARTNERSHIP

**Project Overview**

The Priority Search technique was used as part of a mini community conference to help identify key concerns of those living in the Inverclyde area.

**Stages in the Consultation**

- Recruitment to an initial focus group on the morning of the conference via community contacts and sources
- 2,000 leaflets prepared to publicise the event, with the aim of attracting 100 delegates
- Development of Priority Search questionnaire which was administered before lunch
- Results from questionnaires produced over lunchtime to allow discussion in afternoon focus group sessions
- Feedback given to delegates at the end of the session as part of a 45 minute rounding up session.

**Time and Financial Resources**

The technique cost £4,000 and this covered the hire of staff time from the supplier.

Although it can be used within one day, it would be better, on reflection, to allow more time between the initial discussion groups and the design of the questionnaire to ensure that the latter is clear and covers all issues.

**Other Resources Required**

Central venue.

**Outputs and Outcomes**

The approach was regarded as very successful by community representatives and will be used again for a youth event.

**Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)**

Instant quantitative feedback on qualitative issues was provided.

**Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach**

More time for questionnaire design element.
6.13 PUBLIC MEETINGS

Overview

The aim of Public Meetings is to create a platform upon which members of the public can be given the opportunity to discuss, and give their views on, a particular topic. Whilst very much a traditional approach, the effectiveness of the meeting can be enhanced by the use of targeted methods of ensuring attendance (i.e. inviting individuals to attend specifically) or through the use of new technology to enhance the way in which information is presented.

There can be an element of exchange in Public Meetings with talks given to introduce the subject and set the context within which views are sought. Those attending can then be divided into smaller groups and asked to provide their considered views before wider discussion takes place.

Role

- They provide an opportunity to establish a relationship between service users and providers – creating a feeling of community involvement / participation. This is enhanced where a programme of meetings takes place in rural areas, as this can be seen as recognition of the importance of the views of smaller communities.
- If promoted correctly, Public Meetings can achieve a high profile and reach a wide audience while innovative approaches, such as use of 3D modelling, can increase attendance.

Overall Role within Process

Public Meetings are often used to supplement public consultation projects. It is important that feedback is provided to the attendees at the Public Meeting as this indicates that all views raised have been recorded and will be used where appropriate.

Public Meetings are also used on a stand-alone basis – particularly if an organisation wishes to gauge public opinion on their proposed plans.

Targeting

Public Meetings are not particularly effective in incorporating the views of excluded groups, as the individuals who usually attend them are self-selecting. As such, these individuals are more likely to have strong views and opinions and thus may not be representative of the community.

Some organisations have broadened the reach of Public Meetings by inviting certain individuals or groups to attend. This type of targeted personal invitation can be more effective than a general invitation.
### Issues to Consider

There are a number of issues to consider when using Public Meetings:

- As Public Meetings are traditionally subject to poor attendance, it is very important to consider the target group and arrange the meeting time and venue accordingly - for example, an afternoon event held at a local community centre for a target group of retired people.

- The use of an independent facilitator is recommended.

- The issue being discussed will have a significant impact on attendance, as people are more likely to attend if the subject is of relevance or interest to them.

- The structure of the Public Meeting should be planned in order to avoid backtracking and ensure a flow of comment takes place.

- It may be possible to break up into smaller discussion groups at some point during the Public Meeting in order to increase participation from those attending.

### Resources

The typical cost of holding a Public Meeting is likely to be around £3,500, although this can vary greatly depending on the innovative nature of the approach. The cost includes advertising materials, venue hire, refreshments and the cost of facilitating the meeting.

Effective advertising will ensure that a wide range of groups is aware of the Public Meeting. This could involve using methods such as newspapers, flyers and mail drops.

### Potential Pitfalls

If the meeting is not chaired effectively, there is a chance that specific topics can dominate or that some points of view may not be heard.

### Examples of Use in Scotland

Public Meetings are a popular technique, having been used by the majority of the organisations interviewed in the survey. SIPs were the only organisations where use was identified as under 91%, although almost three-quarters (73%) of SIPs had used Public Meetings as a means of consulting the public.

### Future Use / Approach

Many of the organisations in the survey will use the Public Meeting approach again. Increasingly there is an awareness of the need to sell the meetings positively, through personally inviting people; widespread publicity or generating interest in the meeting by making it appear controversial.
PUBLIC MEETINGS CASE STUDY: SCOTTISH ENTERPRISE TAYSIDE

Project Overview

Public meetings will be held in order to provide relevant information to businesses. The ultimate goal is to make tourism businesses more profitable through better practice.

Stages in the Consultation

- Six tourism networks have been established across the area, although members can attend an event in another area if they wish
- A programme of events is published at the beginning of the year for the entire network
- Events are spread over the winter months (from September to April) at a frequency of approximately once a month
- Additional publicity is used as events approach – i.e. supporting comment or articles in the press, announcements at other meetings etc
- Speakers are selected to be controversial or topical, thus ensuring good attendance
- Meetings will also be used to provide feedback to those attending on consultation with their sector or the results of survey work that has been commissioned.

Time and Financial Resources

The costs are minimal and the meetings are free of charge. Meetings are arranged within members’ premises, which also acts as a draw for some to attend. The actual co-ordination of the meetings is the responsibility of staff in the local tourist board.

Outputs and Outcomes

Overall this represents an effective networking channel in the area as well as building skill levels and co-operation between operators.

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)

This approach provides networking opportunities and sharing of best practice between operators.
It enables operators to ask questions and discuss and debate issues.
Network membership is linked to training and management development opportunities.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach

The challenge is to keep the programme varied and appealing. A new initiative is the addition of ‘Masterclass’ events, featuring top business speakers introducing a more global perspective.

There is a need to be aware of other events and schedule meetings at appropriate times.
6.14  ROUND TABLE WORKSHOPS

**Overview**

The Workshop method enables participants to make a full contribution to discussions on local issues of shared concern and to brainstorm ideas for action. A short-term vision and strategy may be generated as part of a longer-term outlook.

Each Workshop can have a single theme or several themes as part of a strategy. A Workshop may last for only half a day, but ideally will run for a longer period, with the outcomes of one feeding into the next.

**Role**

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Relationships can be built between different groups and sectors by targeting participants widely
- Every effort should be made to ensure that the people with influence and authority in local networks and organisations participate in the workshops
- Participants – who may have been briefed in advance - are seated in a single room at individual round tables of seven to ten people, thus avoiding hierarchies
- By ensuring “maximum mix” of participants to discuss a specific topic, individuals have the opportunity to widen their circle of contacts and cross boundaries.
- It is a good method of providing a wide range of opinions.

The broad stages of the process are as follows:

- A brief introduction is given setting the context and aims of the event
- Specialist presentations, lasting a maximum of one hour, provide technical information and case studies in order to generate new ideas and approaches
- Round Table (brainstorming) discussions, lasting one and a half hours, produce ideas which are recorded on paper or tape
- An opportunity for questions and answers may precede the hour-long concluding session during which the groups report their findings
- A draft of the outcomes is produced for comment.

**Targeting**

As stated above, participants are targeted from different groups and sectors including all communities of interest.

**Resources**

Participants can number from 30 to 100 for each Workshop, while a series of sessions allows as many as 500 people to participate.

The venue should be on neutral ground with sufficient space between tables to allow uninterrupted discussion.
Consultants are usually responsible for carrying out the initial organisation and briefing, while the individual events may be chaired by people of influence. In addition, each table may have a convenor and reporter from other bodies. Specialist contributors bring visual and verbal examples of similar exercises for the purpose of stimulating creative thinking.

Costs can range from £3,000-£5,000 per event to £10,000-£20,000 for a series of events.

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<tr>
<th><strong>Potential Pitfalls</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main problems identified by those who had used the approaches in the past were poor attendance and a possibility of domination by single issues. However, there was a view expressed that some of the Workshops conducted had too wide a remit, as a result of which a more defined approach would be used in the future.</td>
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<td>Adequate planning time at the outset is required.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Examples of Use in Scotland</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Workshops have been widely used by organisations in Scotland, with the bulk of those detailed having been used by local authorities and SIPs. Only Housing Associations emerged as relatively low users of Workshops.</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Future Use / Approach</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>The approaches were widely regarded as having been good value for money by Scottish users. Workshops are likely to be used quite widely in the future and generally form an important element within wider consultation exercises.</td>
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<th><strong>Further Details</strong></th>
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<td>Brenda Calder, Corporate Policy Officer, South Lanarkshire Council (tel: 01698 454444).</td>
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**BOARD GAME & WORKSHOP CASE STUDY: SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**

*Project Overview*

The Board Game was devised as a novel way of assessing how Council budgets could be allocated.

*Stages in the Consultation*

- Recruitment by an external company
- Small sample of 40 residents selected, split evenly by gender, age, socio-economic group and geographical area
- Exercise split into two sessions – discussion group and board game – running between 10.00am and 2.15pm, following which the sessions were reversed
- Recommendations to Committee in January or February 2000, while the budgets for all individual services are being finalised.

*Time and Financial Resources*

The recruitment exercise was completed within one week. There were no other external costs as Council staff gave up their time voluntarily on the day. The approach was considered to be excellent value for money when linked to the cost of the exercise.

Explanation of the format of the exercise was time consuming.

*Outputs and Outcomes*

The process aided the development of the new budget for the Council.

*Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)*

Well received by the consultees who found it to be an enjoyable and realistic way of looking at council spending.

The impact of the findings reinforced what the staff were doing in budgetary terms and gave them the confidence to go to elected members.

*Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach*

South Lanarkshire Council will use the same consultation method in September 2000 to cover the same topics, but with a bigger sample. Other local authorities have also expressed interest in the using the concept of the board game.
WORKSHOP CASE STUDY: CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL

Project Overview
In March 1999, the Corporate Services Department of the City of Edinburgh Council conducted a local priorities participatory appraisal event to enable them to better understand local people’s ideas and priorities regarding the Prestonfield/Priestfield area. Residents in Prestonfield/Priestfield were brought together with relevant officials to develop ideas on ways of responding to the priorities expressed through the event by local people.

Stages in the Consultation
- In June 1999, the Council ran a follow-up Workshop with members of local groups and organisations and senior Council officials
- Eighteen local people and six officials worked at four tables, each of which had a different theme formed from the ideas which had received twenty or more votes in the consultation survey
- The local people were free to move between the tables and record their ideas and opinions on a pre-prepared form using a marker pen or sticky notes
- “Action plans” were drawn up and presented to all the participants
- Action groups were established to address certain of the priorities.

Time and Financial Resources
The Workshop was held on one day in June 1999 at Prestonfield Primary School. An external facilitator was used.

Other Resources Required
Staff from the City of Edinburgh Council gave their time to attend the meeting to record the comments and ideas for progressing the initiatives. The Corporate Services Department of the Council provided financial and logistical support.

Outputs and Outcomes
Further aided the Council in identifying local priorities for the area

Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)
Local people were given the opportunity to express their views in a supportive and relaxed atmosphere. A “user friendly”, jargon-free document was produced and distributed both locally and to relevant departments and agencies.

It was a very interactive approach between consultees and issues.

Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach
None. The Council has now used the approach on five separate occasions.
6.15 SURVEYS (QUESTIONNAIRE BASED)

**Overview**

Questionnaire based surveys are an effective way of contacting a large number of people and gathering their views and comments. Questionnaire surveys are generally used to achieve representative findings and results that are statistically robust. Surveys using this approach can be conducted through face-to-face interviewing, postal/self-completion approaches or by telephone interviewing.

Computer aided interviewing approaches are now available and widely used, both for personal and telephone based surveys. Internet and e-mail questionnaires can also be used to collect information quickly from dispersed groups at a relatively low cost.

**Role**

- Questionnaire surveys are a useful way of collating the views of a large number of people.
- They can gather views on a range of issues while the results can be made available relatively quickly.
- The same approach can be used again in the future, to track any changes that may have occurred.
- Completing the questionnaire face to face or by telephone provides the added benefit of interviewers being able to explain complex points or probe for full information.
- Questionnaire surveys that are based on sound sampling approaches will provide results that are statistically reliable.

**Overall Role within Process**

Questionnaire surveys are often part of wider research projects, although they can be used on a stand-alone basis also.

They can often be conducted and analysed over a relatively short space of time, thus allowing a quick turn around on urgent projects.

**Targeting**

An appropriate sampling approach to reach the target group is key to ensuring that the information obtained is valid and representative of the views of those you wish to consult.

For this reason, when considering the use of self-completion approaches it is important to think about the likely response rate and whether another approach may give a more representative spread of views.

To ensure that everyone is included in questionnaire surveys, it is important to consider the range of features, such as question wording, which may be a cause of exclusion. While it is vital to keep questions simple and clear, it may also be necessary to have questionnaires translated or in Braille format. In other instances, interviewers may need to provide extra help to people who have difficulty in reading and writing.
**Issues to Consider**

- Response rates to postal questionnaires are rarely high - in the region of 10-25% is likely, while 60% is outstanding.
- Due to the structured nature of questionnaire surveys, respondents are not always given the opportunity to explore or discuss issues which they feel are important.
- Questions should be kept to a minimum as respondents are less likely to complete a form or take part in a survey that will take thirty minutes to complete.
- As a poorly worded questionnaire can result in unclear findings, the aim of the questionnaire should be carefully considered and reflected in the questions.
- The questionnaire should be tested prior to use (and not just on colleagues); a pilot should be conducted amongst those who will actually be expected to take part in the survey; ideally a professional interviewer should be used for this purpose as they can provide insight into questions/words which might be unclear and can suggest how the interview might be improved (i.e. use of prompts etc).
- The use of a telephone approach will automatically bias the sample by excluding those without telephones.
- Unless telephone numbers for the target group are available it can be more expensive to use a telephone approach for interviewing rather than face to face (bearing in mind the need to find an appropriate sample, higher refusal rates and the cost of calls). One exception is for more dispersed populations in rural areas.

**Resources**

The cost of questionnaire surveys depends on a number of factors including the number of questions asked, the sample size, and the way in which the questionnaire will be completed (self-completion, face-to-face or telephone). As an example:

- 1,000 face to face interviews of around 30 minutes’ duration could cost c£25,000 – £40,000 through an external agency
- 500 short, 5-minute, face to face interviews could cost c£3,000-£5,000 through an external agency
- Analysis of 20,000 short, self completion questionnaires through an external agency, where there is limited coding and no reporting, would cost £3,000- £5,000
- Analysis of 2,000 complex, self-completion questionnaires, producing tables and reporting on the results, could cost £8,000 -£13,000.

**Potential Pitfalls**

The aim of conducting a quantitative survey is to get representative results. An appropriate sampling approach is paramount.

Skills in questionnaire design are important, as is an ability to deal with the data generated. It is easy for respondents to form jaundiced views about the consultation if it is an issue that has already been debated publicly. It is important to ensure that the questionnaire gives everyone the opportunity to express his or her views. Questions should not be leading.

Consultations based around questionnaire approaches can appear quite distant. Respondents should be offered the opportunity of feedback and efforts should be made to publicise the outcome.
Examples of Use in Scotland

The use of questionnaire surveys was widespread amongst organisations in the survey - for example, all the Pathfinders and LECs had used this approach in addition to the majority of Housing Associations, local authorities and Health Boards / Agencies.

Future Use / Approach

Many of the organisations in the survey acknowledged that poor response rates from self-completion approaches had been a problem when they had conducted their surveys. Less than half of the respondents in the survey suggested that they would use the same approach in the future with no changes.

Resource constraints may limit the extent to which alternative approaches can be used, or used with any frequency. Panel exercises are often seen as more cost effective.
SURVEY CASE STUDY: KIRK CARE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

**Project Overview**

A new housing partnership was proposed for Arran, thus necessitating the transfer of tenants to a new single Housing Agency.

**Stages in the Consultation**

- Identification of local representatives to take part in a steering group
- Consultants were appointed to conduct an in home survey of all 250 tenants on the island (involving interviews with local authority and Housing Association tenants), while local interviewers were identified and trained as a means of helping to improve response rates
- Letters were mailed to all tenants and supporting posters were used
- The views obtained were used in the development of the new housing partnership’s proposed approach; leaflet updates were prepared and articles have appeared in the local newsletter to keep tenants abreast of progress
- A ballot of all tenants will take place in the future, after the statutory consultation has been completed
- Other consultation events are planned or have been used including Public Meetings, the formation of consultation groups and the production of response cards to be distributed throughout the local community.

**Time and Financial Resources**

The entire process commenced in May 1999 and is still on going. The survey element was completed within a 6-week period. Cost information was not disclosed.

**Outputs and Outcomes**

This is part of an on going project to develop the new housing partnership. The views of tenants are being sought by various means throughout the consultation and development process and the survey formed a useful starting point.

**Perceived Benefits of Approach (compared to other consultation methods)**

This approach enables all tenants to be consulted and make their views known. By covering both local authority and Housing Association tenants, the new partnership has been able to develop key messages for each group and target their activity accordingly. The combined approach also allowed comparison to be made on service delivery aspects and suggested how the new forum could combine the better elements of this from both landlords.

**Changes & Adaptations Required/Future Use of Approach**

Overall the approach was regarded as very successful and innovative in that it used a joint approach to tenants of two different landlords. This allowed the findings to be utilised and targeted appropriately. There have been some delays in making the findings known to tenants and maintaining the impetus of the consultation.
# OTHER CONSULTATION APPROACHES

## 6.16 ACTION PLANNING

### Overview

Action Planning, if used appropriately, is suited to projects looking at planning and development issues within the community and urban regeneration for example. Events are usually run by a partnership of interested bodies (from different backgrounds) and everyone in the community is invited along to give their opinion. Members of the community work in conjunction with specialists and assist in advising on matters such as planning or urban design issues. The events can last anything from 1 to 5 days depending on the subject matter.

### Role

- Action Planning is a good way of involving community members in deciding what they want and need in their community and making plans on how they can achieve it. Community involvement is a key feature; members of the community are likely to be appreciative that they are being given the opportunity to voice their opinions.
- It is a good opportunity to inform members of the community about any plans.
- It provides an opportunity for communities to raise new and innovative ideas that the specialists may not have considered themselves.

### Targeting

Action Planning is similar to many other approaches in that it is not always guaranteed that you will reach the people whose views you seek. However, a carefully planned advertising campaign can increase the community’s awareness of the event.

### Issues to Consider

- Careful consideration of the venue and location where the event will be held is important; it must be in an accessible location where members of the community are likely to attend.
- Encouraging participants to prioritise community needs may help minimise disagreement.

### Resources

The cost of conducting an event can vary drastically and is dependent on factors such as the topic for discussion, the length of time across which the event is taking place and the specialists that are involved in the event. Action Planning events can cost approximately £15,000-20,000 (although this does not include professional organisers).

Typically, Action Planning events involve 150 to 300 people, although it has been known for up to 1000 people to be involved.

### Further Details

The Urban Design Group can provide the *Public Participation Programme* document that provides information and advice on various methods for involving communities in urban design and on experienced practitioners. Email: Nick@Wates.demon.co.uk.
### 6.17 CHOICES

#### Overview

The Choices technique involves large numbers of people in developing a vision for their community. It is an elaborate process requiring a long lead-time and the support of local media and volunteers.

The exercise is divided into four stages:

- **Meetings Throughout the Community** - people generate ideas to improve future quality of life
- **Consolidation of Goals** - ideas are presented to meetings or vision workshops led by facilitators and are then consolidated into goals or ‘vision statements’ by interested parties
- **Vision Fair** - people vote on the goals which matter most to them and which they would most like to attain, following which the goals and visions are published
- **Action Groups** - these are formed to implement the chosen ideas

#### Role

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Choices is conducted in such a way that the community feels inspired to act upon the vision
- People can conduct the discussions in familiar surroundings with friends and neighbours, thus facilitating participation
- As much of the population as possible is involved in the exercise
- Highly successful outcomes are achieved.

In Bristol, Choices distributed 7,000 copies of their Discussion Guide. A total of 2,032 ideas for improving the city were forthcoming from groups using the Guide and from Vision Bristol Roadshows.

Subsequently, two Vision Bristol meetings for adults and young people converted these ideas into achievable goals and six Vision Statements. They were published in February 1997 as *Your Ideal Bristol? Let’s Make It Happen*. To date, Choices for Bristol has supported action on libraries, a youth forum, waterways and transport.

#### Targeting

All sectors of the community can be involved in this process.

#### Issues to Consider

The following issues should be taken into account:

- Choices is a lengthy and complicated process
- Many different groups are involved in the exercise
**Resources**

As stated above, Choices is a lengthy process.

In the event that a Discussion Guide is not produced for local groups, many facilitators will be required at this stage – for example, the planning phase of ReVision 2000 included the training of 150 volunteers in facilitation. Facilitators are definitely required for meetings that involve the whole neighbourhood.

Venues can range in size from small public meeting places to large facilities for meetings involving the entire neighbourhood.

Budgets depend on the scale of the project and can expand with the success of the programme. Bristol allocated a budget of around £35,000 for the whole city, in addition to £50,000 to cover volunteers’ time.

**Examples of Use**

To date, the full Choices approach is known to have been used in Bristol. Some aspects of the approach are apparent also in the use of consultation documents by Scottish organisations for example *Vision for Edinburgh* and *Imagine Aberdeen* by their respective city councils.

**Further Details**

Information on Choices can be found on the website [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)
Overview

Community indicators are being developed in communities throughout the UK to measure local trends that are important in these communities. These tools allow essential information to be simplified, measured and communicated and can be a mechanism through which local people can make their opinions heard. The results increase awareness of problems and opportunities and help to establish agreement about future action. They contrast with performance indicators, established using a top down approach and seek to provide a uniform basis for comparing communities on standard measures.

The process involves six distinct steps:

- Start-up
- Identification of issues through questionnaires, interviews and workshops
- Selection of indicators for each issue
- Gathering of information
- Communicating progress to the community through the relevant media
- Action and progress review.

Role

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Communities of all varieties and sizes can be involved
- Local people have the opportunity to effect changes in their communities
- The operational costs are relatively low.

Targeting

All sectors of the community are involved in this process.

Resources

An internal or external facilitator, in addition to local experts, may aid the process. Participants should have access to a quiet area where they can work in small groups. Information display boards may also be helpful. Operational costs are low, unless a report or display is prepared.

Examples of Use

At present, there are many community indicator initiatives in the UK, which aim to involve the whole community. Work planned by SIPs in Scotland will also follow this model in identifying a range of indicators appropriate to each SIP’s target groups.

Further Details

Information on Community Indicators can be found in Participation Works.\(^{47}\)

\(^{47}\) New Economics Foundation, Participation Works: 21 techniques of community participation for the 21\(^{st}\) century.
### Overview

The Design Game is a modelling technique. It is based on a scale plan of a site mounted on card and has moveable pieces that can be used by a group to create their own design.

### Role

This consultation method is relevant when the following circumstances apply:

- The site is not excessively large and can be easily defined
- Members of the group are well acquainted with the pertinent issues and problems
- The project has received confirmation.

The exercise is divided into several distinct stages:

- A survey of the site and its problems is implemented
- The group participates in site visits and examines relevant material
- Following a brainstorming session, specific elements are drawn to scale
- The pieces are moved around the board (main game)
- The results are drawn up by a landscape architect
- A detailed scheme is put together for implementation by a contractor or the group, working independently or as a partnership.

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Participants are empowered to manage the exercise
- Responsibility for management decisions is disseminated outwards
- Many people can be involved in the process

### Targeting

As mentioned above, this technique is accessible to a large number of people. The visual display is acceptable to those with poor literacy skills and appeals to all ages.

### Resources

There is no finite number of participants. The services of a landscape architect and contractor are required. The venue should be sufficiently large to allow people access to the model.

### Further Details

Information on the Design Game can be found in *A Guide to Consultation* published by South Lanarkshire Council.
Overview
A Future Search conference enables a community or organisation to create a shared vision for its future. Stakeholders are selected on the basis of prior knowledge of the topic or as they are likely to be affected by the outcomes. The main stages of the process are as follows:

- Review of the past
- Exploration of the present
- Creation of ideal future scenarios
- Identification of a shared vision
- Formulation of action plans

Role
Participants may feel empowered as they are regarded as experts in their own lives, there is an emphasis on self-management in small group work and all contributions are displayed.

Targeting
Future Search commonly involves 64 participants forming 8 tables of 8 stakeholder groups.

Resources
A minimum of 1 facilitator is required, together with a committed partnership group. The venue must be large enough to incorporate 64 people in tables of 8, presentation space and display areas. This highly structured process generally costs between £5,000 and £10,000, although the cost of some of the first Future Searches in the UK ranged from £2,500-£40,000.

Issues to Consider
A Future Search conference is considered appropriate when the following factors apply:

- There are influential people in strong support of the approach in the sponsoring body
- All sectors of the community are represented by the steering group
- Sufficient time is available to recruit participants and prepare for the event

Examples of Use
Approximately 20 Future Search conferences have been held since the first UK training was organised in 1995, including one in Moray. Most conferences have taken place in local communities, with some specifically targeted towards health. Aspects of the approach have been used in various conferences organised in Scotland e.g. Wester Hailes Youth Conference.

Further Details
Further details can be obtained from the websites www.neweconomics.org and www.searchnet.org
6.21 LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY MODEL

Overview

The Local Sustainability Model is a technique by which a community can assess its present position and test the likely effects of projects.

The Model has provided a very useful way of organising our thoughts about sustainability across a wide range of different organisations and individuals. We have used it to assess our area, possible projects and our own present and future performance.

comment in relation to Highland Perthshire Community Partnership

The Model consists of a three by three matrix. The columns represent the three components of sustainability while the rows represent the condition of these components. The current state of affairs is defined and projects are assessed through their effects on the Model. Using a quantitative approach, teams of no more than seven people assign scores to each column, discuss the results and agree a common assessment.

Role

The strengths of the approach are as follows:

- Local people can assess the impact which projects will have on their community
- Discussion and co-operative working are encouraged.

Targeting

There is no finite number of participants, although it is preferable for the discussion groups to have no more than seven members.

Resources

A facilitator is required in the initial stages. The size of the venue will depend on the numbers involved, while the budget should be sufficient to cover facilitation and training.

Examples of Use

To date, the Local Sustainability Model has been utilised to train the personnel responsible for Local Agenda 21 in several UK councils and by Highland Perthshire Community Partnership in Scotland. The approach involved representatives of 19 local and diverse voluntary organisations working together on economic, environmental and community development with the aim of addressing rural disadvantage. The Model was used to identify a common view of the current local area and assess the likely impact of proposed projects.

Further Details

Further details relating to the methodology and specific training resources can be obtained from 100131.3310@compuserve.com.
6.22 PARISH MAPS

Overview

This approach encourages people to examine and assess what is important to them in their local environment and to contribute to its development. The most effective Parish Maps are established by local people, although local authorities have also produced good examples. The Map expresses the views and experiences of the ‘mappers’, and can be produced in many formats e.g. woven, printed, painted, filmed, animated, performed and written.

The project is undertaken by groups of varying sizes that establish their own methods and rules of working and set their own timescales. Individuals can participate by gathering information or contributing to the production of the Map.

Role

The strengths of the approach are as follows:
- All sectors of the community can be involved
- Each participant is allowed to act as an ‘expert’
- Individuals can work at their own pace and with a high degree of flexibility
- Levels of community spirit, co-operation and awareness are increased
- Many new initiatives are encouraged

Targeting

As stated above, any members of the local community can participate in this activity. The group is encouraged to be adaptable and flexible in order to attract new participants.

Resources

Numbers of people involved can vary from a core group of less than 10 to a large group of many hundreds. Although facilitators are not an essential requirement, some groups have used the services of an arts or environment worker, and professionals such as archaeologists or planners may provide assistance. Venues are required for meetings and for permanently displaying the Map. Budgets range from a minimal cost to several hundred pounds.

Examples of Use

This approach has been widely used in the UK. Over 2,000 Maps had been produced by 1989, whilst a series of nationwide exhibitions in 1996 resulted in many hundreds more.

Further Details

Information on Parish Maps can be found in Participation Works! In addition, Common Ground (based in London) maintains lists of mappers and support organisations for new groups to access. These lists relate specifically to England, but include a few contacts in Scotland, Wales and overseas.

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ANNEX 1 RESEARCH METHODS

A multi-stage approach to the research was adopted. The initial stage of the research comprised desk research, using published and electronic information to establish the extent and scope of current guidance on consultation techniques and to help identify the range of approaches that were being used by public sector agencies more generally across the UK. This was followed by an audit of practice to date amongst various public sector groups in Scotland. As well as collecting details on the levels of use of various approaches, details about specific consultation exercises were collected and this formed the basis for selecting case study organisations to be investigated in more detail at the next stage. The final phase of the approach involved interviews with a sample of consultees to establish their views of the consultation exercises with which they were involved.

Desk Research

A wide variety of sources were consulted and these are detailed in Annex 2 of this report. Sources used have included:

- publicly available documents such as COSLA, LGIU and Cabinet Office guides
- internal documents produced by or on behalf of local authorities, health boards, SIPS, LECs, Working for Communities Pathfinders and housing associations.
- newsletters such as GOSSIP and Programme for Partnership which provides information about some consultation exercises more informally.

Audit of Activity

The main data generated at the outset of the research was from a programme of telephone interviews with local authorities, health boards, SIPS, LECs, Working for Communities Pathfinders and housing associations. A personalised letter was sent to each of these organisations by the Scottish Executive explaining the nature of the project and asking for their assistance. An attempt was then made to interview, by telephone, all those who had received these introductory letters. A target of 125 interviews was set and a total of 126 organisations were interviewed\(^49\). The range of those interviewed was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Number in Sample</th>
<th>Number Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIP</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Board</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Enterprise Company</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WfC Pathfinders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Associations</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>141</strong></td>
<td><strong>126</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{49}\) Highland LECs were excluded from the approach as a similar review of consultation approaches used by the Highland Network was taking place at the same time. Where organisations were not interviewed this was generally because they stated that at the time of interview they had not undertaken any significant consultation.
A semi-structured questionnaire was devised for use in the audit programme of interviews. After initial piloting with 12 organisations, it was decided to reduce the questionnaire in length. Despite this, the average interview length was longer than anticipated, at around 30 minutes, reflecting the number of consultation approaches being used by organisations and the wide ranging and complex nature of some of these approaches.

Case Studies

Upon completion of the interviews, eight case studies were selected for more detailed evaluation. The selection criteria included consideration of the type of organisation, their use of consultation techniques and in particular their use of innovative or unusual consultation approaches as well as their geographical location.

From the sample of 126 organisations, 32 were selected as potential case studies. For each, a brief summary was composed, giving details of consultation approaches used, general comments were made on the process and success of the approach employed and any salient points that were raised in the course of the interview were also noted. The summaries were then presented to the Scottish Executive for their consideration; and these formed the basis of the selection of the case studies. After some consideration 8 case studies were selected, on the basis that these organisations would provide valuable information on the usage and understanding of consultation techniques.

To ensure full and effective coverage of the organisations interviewed, three local authorities (Clackmannanshire, Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire), one housing association (Kirk Care), one local enterprise company (Scottish Enterprise Tayside), one health board (Greater Glasgow) and two Social Inclusion Partnerships (North Ayr and Inverclyde) were selected for inclusion in this phase of the research.

A programme of depth interviews and paired depth interviews was set up with each organisation. Interviews were completed in person by executive staff from George Street Research with a range of personnel from within the organisations. This included those who commissioned and managed research projects, those that used the outcomes and some partner agencies. If key staff were not available at the time the visit was made to the organisation, follow up contact was made by telephone. All interviews were recorded and notes made on these. Much additional material was provided during these interviews and we are very grateful to the organisations concerned for their help and assistance.

Interviews with case study organisations took place from October through December 1999.

Consultees

Each of the case study organisations was asked for permission to allow the researchers to contact some of those who had taken part in consultation exercises. This raised ethical issues, as there was a need in some instances for the organisations themselves to contact individuals and ask for the individual’s permission to have details passed to an outside agency. In other instances, the researchers were able to make contact with consultees actively taking part in consultation events during the research period and to gain their permission directly.
Two of the eight organisations were unable to provide access to their consultees; one was against this in principle on confidentiality grounds and the other did not have records available that would facilitate this.

Consultees that had been involved in a wide range of different types of consultation event were contacted from the remaining six case study organisations. A total of 98 interviews were completed by telephone with those who had taken part in different consultation exercises. These interviews were completed from the offices of George Street Research by telephone, throughout December 1999 and early January 2000.

The examples, quotes and comments made by individuals and organisations throughout the report are based on information from all stages of the research.
ANNEX 2 LIST OF REFERENCES

General Consultation Approaches, Strategies and Plans

Aberdeen City Council
The Art of Partnership

Cabinet Office
An Introductory Guide: How to Consult Your Users

City of Edinburgh Council
Decentralisation Scheme
Prestonfield and Priestfield (SPI)
Scheme of Decentralisation
Community Groups Register: A Tool for Consultation
Consultation Database: An Aid to Consultation
Guiding Principles for Consultation
Consultation Matters: A Guide to Consultation

Clackmannanshire Council
Community Stakeholding
Future Directions

COSLA
Focusing on Citizens: A Guide to Approaches and Methods
The Citizen-Customer Focus: Directory of Initiatives by Councils (June 99)

Dumfries & Galloway Community Care Consultation Group
Good Practice Guide to Consultation in Dumfries & Galloway

Fife Council
Consultation Guidelines: Effective Public Involvement
How to Organise a Citizens’ Jury

Forth Valley Health Board
Food for Life: Forth Valley Nutrition Action Plan
Multi-Agency Oral and Dental Health Strategy for Forth Valley 1999-2004

Glasgow City Council
Community and Voluntary Sector Involvement Strategy and Structures

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Accessing Data from or the Views of the Public or Discrete Communities
Proposals to Challenge the Stigma Associated with Mental Health

Institute of Development Studies
Introduction to Participatory Approaches and Methodologies
The Power of Participation
Participatory Monitoring & Evaluation: Learning from Change

Inverclyde Regeneration Partnership
The Social Wellbeing Strategy Group Proposals
The Social Wellbeing Strategy Group
Proposals and Suggestions for Consideration by Community Forums
A Strategic Approach to the Urban Programme: Proposed Brief and Remit for three Strategy Groups
LARIA
Research & Its Role in the Local Authority Planning Department
Beyond Statistics: The Role of Qualitative Research in the New Local Government Agenda

Local Government Information Unit
Good Practice in Local Authorities
Citizens’ Panels: A New Approach to Community Consultation
Consulting for Real: Juries, Panels and Groups

North Ayr Partnership
Strategy 1998-2001

Renfrewshire Council
Customer/citizen consultation

Scottish Participatory Initiatives
Prestonfield and Priestfield
Participatory Appraisal
The Context of Participatory Appraisals

South Lanarkshire Council
A Guide to Consultation
The Citizen-Customer Focus (Citizens’ Panels and Juries)
Our Aims

Stirling Council
Local Democracy and Community Leadership

Reports and Supporting Materials

Local Authority

Aberdeenshire Council
Mystery Shopping Case Study

Angus Council
Public Consultation Montrose

City of Edinburgh Council
Budget Forum
Letter and leaflet re Citizens’ Panel
Wester Hailes Youth Conference (conference pack)

Clackmannanshire Civic Commission
Travel Choices

Clackmannanshire Council
Progress Through Partnership Seminar
Development Plan Consultation Pack
Civic Commission Evaluation

Dunfermline Forum on Disability
Users’ Experiences of the Home Care Service in West Fife

East Dunbartonshire Council
Residents’ Survey
Customer Focus Group Report
East Lothian Council
*Community Consultation Conference*

Fife Council
*Levenmouth Citizens’ Jury*
*A Voice in The Park*
*People’s Priorities*
*Citizenship Commission*
*Coastal Issues Day*
*Consultation Diary 1998/99*
*Consultation Diary 1999/00*

Fife Children’s Participation Forum
*“Our Day”*

Glasgow City Council
*Citizens’ Panel*

Perth & Kinross Council
*Citizens’ Panel (Viewfinder)*
*Two reports by Director of Housing and Building Services*

Renfrewshire Council
*Reports relating to Citizens’ Panel*

Scottish Borders Council
*Better Government for Older People (newsletter)*

South Lanarkshire Council
*Information for Registration of Births*
*Information for Registration of Death*
*Citizens’ Jury Initiative*
*Citizens’ Juries: Evaluation Report*
*Rural Focus – A Citizens’ Jury*
*Rural Focus Progress Report – July-December 1998*
*Rural Focus Progress Report – Jan-August 1999*
*Customer Panels*
*Citizens’ Panel – Recruitment and Survey Findings*
*Citizens’ Panel November 1998*
*Access to Leisure and Entertainment for Young People in East Kilbride*
*Commission on Health and Young People:*
*Evaluation Report*
*Commission on Health and Young People: April Report 1998*
*Citizens’ Panel October 1998*
*Citizens’ Panel Community Planning Survey*
*Focus on Hillhouse Summary Recommendations*
*Focus on Hillhouse April 1998*
*Citizens’ Panel First Survey*
*Citizens’ Panel Feedback*
*Citizens’ Panel Community Planning Survey Reminder*
*Citizens’ Panel Proposed Programme of Use*

West Dunbartonshire Council
*Sheriff Court Consultation*
*Citizens’ Panel*
Housing

Arran New Housing Partnership
Perception Monitoring Exercise
Steering Group Meeting
Tenants’ Perception Survey
September 1999 update

Irvine Housing Association
House & Home (newsletter)
Stakeford Focus Group
Satisfaction Survey (sample)

Kintry Housing Partnership
Communities together in Niddrie/Craigmillar

Kirk Care Housing Association
Tenant Participation
Tenants’ Consultation Meeting, Joppa (minutes)

Link Group
Annual Review 1998/99
Response Repairs Satisfaction Survey

Link Housing
Tenants’ News (newsletter)

Health

Ardler Effect
Health Audit for 3 areas in Dundee

Fife Health Board
Panel Meetings

Forth Valley Health Board
Health News (newsletter)
Caring in Our Community
“A Day in the Life”

Glasgow 2000
Survey on Passive Smoking in Glasgow

Glasgow Caledonian University
Evaluation of the Health Club

Greater Glasgow Health Board
Pre-Test of a Breast Screening Campaign
Promoting Breast Screening in Glasgow
Assessment of Health Education in Primary Schools
Drumchapel Health Club
Teenage Poster Campaigns
Stigma Consultation
Eating Habits of 16-29 year olds in Greater Glasgow
“Sharing Ideas”
Pollok Breastfeeding Project
Highland Health Board
Breast Cancer Focus Group
Multiple Sclerosis Focus Group
Diabetes Focus Group
Acquired Brain Injury Focus Group
Women, Low Income and Smoking

Lanarkshire Health Board
South Lanarkshire “Pathway”
North Lanarkshire “Pathway”

New Community Schools
Health Needs Assessment

Orkney Health Board
Stroke Care Seminar
Science of Health Day

South and North Lanarkshire
Framework News for Mental Health Services (newsletters)
University of Glasgow
Review of Health and Lifestyle Surveys undertaken by Health Boards in Scotland

Partnerships
Arbroath SIP
Community Needs Analysis

East End SIP
Baseline Study

Inverclyde Community Forums
Community Forums Review Day
Response to Scottish Office Consultation Paper on the
Review of the Urban Programme Jan 99

Inverclyde Regeneration Partnership
Poverty Task Group
Survey of Residents’ Views
Mini Community Conference (leaflet)
Partnership News (newsletter)
Consultees - Poverty Task Group, Residents’ Survey, Community Conference, Social Inclusion Consultation

Levern Valley Partnership
Working Group Minutes for “Working for Communities”

Motherwell Social Inclusion Partnership
Open Space
Make It Stick

North Ayr Partnership

North Edinburgh SIP
Muirhouse: A Strategy for Improvement
Muirhouse: A Better Place to Live
Paisley Partnership Regeneration Company
Operating Plan 1999

West Drumoyne Partnership Initiative
Priority Search Survey

West Dunbartonshire Partnership
Community Forum Launches
Funding Seminar

Local Enterprise Companies
Scottish Enterprise Tayside
Events Programme 1998/99
Miscellaneous notes

Government
The Scottish Office/Scottish Executive
Perceptions of Local Government: A Report of Focus Group Research
The Role and Effectiveness of Community Councils with regard to Community Consultation
Involving Civil Society in the Work of Parliaments
Review of the Urban Programme: A Consultation Paper
Shortlist of Partnerships to help Socially Excluded Groups
£10 million to get Local Services working for Communities
New Housing Partnerships – 1999-2002
Social Inclusion Partnership Fund replaces Urban Programme
Stepping up the Fight against Social Exclusion
Government Cash Boost on Social Exclusion
Report of the Community Planning Group
Pathfinders to the Parliament
GOSSIP (newsletter for Social Inclusion Partnerships)
Programme for Partnership (newsletter)

Other
Association of Scottish Community Councils
2nd National Survey

University of Strathclyde
Castlemilk Leaflet Initiative Evaluation